SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

VOL. I.

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BY THE LATE

REV. THOMAS LELAND, D.D.

— K

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY GEORGE BONHAM,

FOR WILLIAM M'KENZIE, BOOKSELLER, IN DAME STREET; AND FOR THOMAS LONGMAN, BOOKSELLER, PATER NOSTER ROW, LONDON.

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MDCCLXXVIII.

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THE EDITOR casts himself on the Candour of the Public for the Indulgence which a posthumous Publication always claims; and flatters himself it will not prejudice the Memory of Doctor Leland, if any of the ensuing Discourses should be deemed such as he would not have published himself. The preserving such of them as he had given his Approbation to by printing them, will, it is hoped, be deemed of Utility: as some most valuable Writings of able Men have been lost to the Public, for want of being collected. The Account of his Life and Writings was sent by a Gentleman formerly a Member of the same College with him, and who was most intimately acquainted with Doctor Leland's Character, and the Incidents related.

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SOME

ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF THE

AUTHOR.

DR. Thomas Leland was born in Dublin, A. D. 1722, of parents worthy and respectable, but not opulent or exalted: a circumstance which, for his honour, ought not to be suppressed; not only because his merit and abilities raised and qualified him, in spite of this obstruction, to associate with persons of the first rank in his time, but particularly, because

cauſe it adds to the praiſe of that filial reſpect and tenderneſs of which he was ever a moſt amiable example*. He received the firſt rudiments of a claſſical education at the ſchool of Dr. Sheridan; whoſe character and ſucceſs in forming excellent ſcholars are well known: and when Dr. Sheridan removed to Cavan, remained under the inſtruction of the Reverend John Magill; who, having been Dr. Sheridan's aſſiſtant, continued his plan and methods. In 1737 he entered a Penſioner in Trinity College, Dublin: in 1741 was elected Scholar of the Houſe: commenced A. B. in 1742; ſat as candidate for a Fellowſhip in 1745; when Mr. Boſwell, who had been candidate the year before, was elected: commenced A. M. the ſame year: and in 1746, ſitting as candidate again, was

* ——— *natum—in tenui re*
Majores pennas nido extendiſſe laſcaris;
Ut quantum generi demas, virtutibus addas:
HOR.

unanimouſly

unanimouſly choſen a Fellow. The extenſive courſe of ſtudy requiſite for appearing to advantage on that very publick examination, which is ſo much the boaſt of Dublin College, has been, by ſome prejudiced or ignorant reaſoners, ſuppoſed to have a tendency to overſtrain the faculties at an early ſeaſon of life, and to produce a relaxation, and a diſpoſition to indolence, afterwards. Among the many laudable inſtances which refute the abſurd and invidious ſuggeſtion, Dr. Leland is a ſignal one. He, immediately from the time of his election into a Fellowſhip, engaged and continued in an ardent purſuit of knowledge. Though he had given proof of a conſiderable proficiency in the mathematical parts of learning, yet moral reaſoning, hiſtory, and claſſical literature, were more agreeable to his turn of mind. To the ſtudies of ſcripture critically, and of theological writings, preparatory to entering into holy orders, he was determined,

mined, as much by inclination, as by the oath taken at admiſſion to his Fellowſhip. He not only purſued theſe ſtrenuouſly, but added to them, previouſly to his ordination, (which took place in 1748) a conſiderable portion of earlier eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, and the attentive peruſal of ſome of the beſt antient apologiſts. At this period of his life he drew up a diſcourſe on "the helps and "impediments to the acquiſition of "knowledge in religious and moral ſub-"jects." This early eſſay he probably deſtroyed; for there is no copy of it to be found: it is only mentioned, to ſhew how ſtrongly his mind was poſſeſſed with theſe ſubjects. But with all this he preſerved an ardent attention to claſſical literature, ſo uſeful to the divine, and ſo requiſite in a member of a ſeat of learning.

The orations of Demoſthenes were not, at this time, ſtudied in Dublin College

lege as they deſerved. His juſt and manly taſte determined him to make them very much the object of his attention. He read alſo with much care the antient maſters of rhetoric. A very accidental occaſion in the year 1749 firſt led him to attempt tranſlating ſome paſſages of the great Athenian orator: when he had once attempted it, he continued it, as an uſeful exerciſe, rather than with any determination, for a long time at leaſt, of publiſhing. It is probable he owed much of the powers of expreſſion and compoſition which he afterwards diſplayed, to his early tranſlating this great maſter of energy, perſpicuity, and proſaic modulation.

In 1754 he and Dr. John Stokes * publiſhed, at the deſire of the Univerſity, an

* Dr. John Stokes was the moſt intimate friend of Dr. Leland almoſt from his childhood: they had been ſchool-fellows, had ſtudied the fellowſhip courſe together,

an edition of *all* the Philippic orations of Demosthenes, with a latin version and notes,

together, with mutual assistance and communication, and obtained fellowships at the same time. His character is thus drawn by one who knew him well. Scrupulous integrity, humble piety, benevolence even to aching tenderness, great learning, clear judgment, and a well-stored imagination, were in him veiled from general notice, partly by a natural modesty even to bashfulness, and a timidity of temper, and partly by a reserve, the effect of a retired life: This retirement itself arose principally from infirm health, but in some measure also from a sensitiveness in morals and decorum bordering on excess, for he was "*tremblingly alive all over*" to the pain arising from being witness to any impropriety, or even from the presence of one of whose heart and principles he had an ill opinion. The offence he conceived hurt only himself; for he never hurt any other creature. This timidity and delicacy tinged even his compositions, in which, amid the soundest sense and strictest propriety, he seemed to forbid himself those bolder flights which generally approach to the confines of what severe judgment is apt to condemn. Too little regarded therefore by the world, he was passionately beloved and admired by his near connections;

notes, for the uſe of the Students. To this no name was affixed. The Engliſh tranſlation of the ſame orations was the firſt work which Dr. Leland ventured to publiſh with his name; and this was not until after long and repeated importunity of more than one cautious and modeſt, as well as judicious, friend. When at length he publiſhed it, in 1755, the ability with which, in the preface to that work, he had treated hiſtorical ſubjects, was the occaſion of his being urged by Lord Charlemont (whoſe friendſhip to him at that period he has acknow-

nections; toward whom his life was a courſe of affectionate indulgence, and amid whom he converſed with a conſtant pleaſantry, the reſult of innocence, and of chriſtian reſignation to perpetual ſuffering. The union between him and Dr. Leland was an union for life: nor did death divide them long; the latter ſurviving his friend only three years and ſome months. Thoſe who knew Dr. John Stokes will not be diſpleaſed at this tribute to his memory. To others, the uncommonneſs of the character may excuſe its being inſerted.

ledged with exultation and gratitude) to undertake a life of Philip of Macedon. The acuteneſs and accuracy wherewith he has collected the ſcattered materials; the art and judgment exerted in weaving them into an uniform and pleaſing narative; the ſkilful delineation of a character and conduct ſo complicated as thoſe of his hero, and (unhappily for mankind) too prevalent in human affairs, and therefore peculiarly entitled to obſervation: the light he has thrown upon a moſt embroiled and moſt important period of antient hiſtory; and the aſſiſtance he has given toward more thoroughly underſtanding the nobleſt and moſt perfect models of antient eloquence, and receiving more delight and improvement from them; all theſe circumſtances render this work highly honourable to his memory; and its reputation in other reſpects, among the learned, has ſeemed to encreaſe with the ſenſe of its uſefulneſs. The firſt edition was printed in

1758. He was then D. D. having taken that degree in February, 1757.

AFTER the publication of this work he was employed for ſome in the tranſlation of other orations of Demoſthenes, viz. the public ones, with the antagoniſt orations of Æſchines, againſt Cteſiphon, and on the charge of corruption in the ambaſſy. Theſe were publiſhed in 1761.

I HAVE reaſon to believe that about this time, or not long after, he had conceived the idea of writing ſome part of the hiſtory of theſe countries; and at intervals had been reading the antient and original Engliſh hiſtorians. The hiſtorical romance of Longſword Earl of Saliſbury, which appeared in 1762, is generally ſuppoſed to be his production: but though it be ſtrictly moral, and intended to convey a valuable leſſon, "the "bleſſings of equal law and regular go-

"vernment,"

"vernment," yet he never formally avowed it. If it be pronounced his, it muſt be conſidered as a *Jeu d'Eſprit:* and it could be demonſtrated that it muſt have coſt him very little time. It diſplays powers of fancy and imitation, ſome ſtrong moral painting, and a deep impreſſion of the manners of the feudal times. If this work ſeem not to accord with the more ſolid and inſtructive turn of his writings in general; it ſhould be obſerved on the other ſide, that his talents were really various; and that in his hours of leiſure and amuſement he diſplayed, in little occaſional eſſays communicated to friends only, ſuch humour and imagination, as others would have been impatient of concealing from the public eye: particularly, in agreeableneſs of familiar letter writing he had few equals.

FROM the peruſal of the antient Engliſh hiſtorians, he was gradually led into a pretty

a pretty general acquaintance with antient Engliſh literature. When, by the bounty of the governors of the ſchools founded by Eraſmus Smith, Eſq; the endowment of the oratory profeſſorſhip in the Univerſity of Dublin had been augmented, and a new profeſſorſhip, that of modern hiſtory, founded, the latter would have been his choice: but his acknowledged abilities for filling the other, and the difficulty of ſupplying with equal propriety ſo conſpicuous a ſtation, were ſtrong motives with the board of ſenior fellows; and he was accordingly fixed in that chair, which he filled, with honour to himſelf and to the Univerſity, upwards of eighteen years.

In the public lectures, which are delivered by the profeſſor at the opening of every term, he had begun an account of the progreſs of Engliſh compoſition, when he was called off to the defence of

the

the art he professed. That very extraordinary man Bishop Warburton had, in his 'Doctrine of Grace,' been led to take notice of the arguments urged by the infidel and the half infidel against the divine inspiration of the writers of the New Testament, from their supposed want of purity, elegance, &c. This wretched sophistry he, according to his usual dangerous practice, had opposed by paradox: and contended that the vindication of so important a doctrine required such assertions as these, (1) 'That the Evangelists and Apostles, 'writing in a language the knowledge 'of which had been miraculously in-'fused, could be masters of the words 'only, and not of the idioms; and 'therefore must write barbarously.'—(2) 'That eloquence was not any real 'quality, but something merely fantas-'tical and arbitrary, an accidental abuse 'of human speech.'—(3) 'That it had 'no end but to deceive by the appear-

'ance

'ance of vehement inward perſuaſion, 'and to pervert the judgment by in-'flaming the paſſions.'— 'And, (4) as 'being a deviation from the principles 'of logic and metaphyſics, was [fre-'quently] vicious,' &c. Dr. Leland thought it neceſſary, both to refute theſe ſtrange poſitions, and to ſhew how the ſtyle and language of the New Teſtament were defenſible without them. The ſubſtance of ſome lectures on theſe heads he publiſhed in 1764, under the title of 'A Diſſertation on the princi-'ples of Human Eloquence;' which was immediately encountered by ſome friend and admirer (we muſt ſuppoſe) of Biſhop Warburton, in 'A Letter to the Rev. 'Dr. Leland;' publiſhed without a name. This ſeems to have been the work of a ſubtle diſputant, practiſed in the arts of polemic writing: but it was anſwered by Dr. Leland with ſuch force of argument, ſuch ſpirit, and addreſs, as effectually ſilenced the controverſy, and gained our

profeſſor

professor the suffrage of the learned world in a very distinguished manner. There was not any of his writings which made him more the object of attention, and contributed more to raise his general character, than this controversy.

Not long after he was named one of the Chaplains to his Excellency Lord Viscount Townshend, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. This nobleman admired his talents, and delighted in his conversation; he is even said to have expressed his regret that political interests and connections, the bane of every thing right and good, rendered it so difficult for a governor to shew attention to merit and ability like his. It was supposed, toward the end of his administration, when his esteem of Dr. Leland had been heightened by a considerable degree of intimacy, he had determined to raise him to a bishopric, had one fallen vacant. As it happened, he obtained, during Lord Townshend's administration, no other preferment than

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the Prebend of Rathmichael in the Cathedral of St. Patrick, Dublin, which is united with the vicarage of Bray in the ſame dioceſe; both together in value not 150l. but tenable with his Fellowſhip, and having a ſmall glebe houſe in a beautifully retired and romantic ſituation, about ſeven miles from Dublin. To theſe he was collated in 1768. This retreat was often of great convenience to him in executing the moſt voluminous work in which he had yet engaged, his Hiſtory of Ireland, in three volumes quarto: in which he gave the fulleſt proof of accuracy, diſcernment and impartiality, in animated and dignified expreſſion uniformly preſerved. It is a work that does honour to the country, which is its ſubject, and which produced the hiſtorian: and redounds to the credit of the latter ſtill more, in proportion as it is known from what baſe and ſcanty materials ſuch an edifice has been conſtructed: what the difficulty, not

only

only of tracing and examining the original or authentic accounts, and of ſelection amid monkiſh fable, wretched trifling, and barbarous ignorance, but of aſcertaining the truth amid horrid miſrepreſentation of hoſtile factions, great on all ſides, though perhaps not on all ſides equaly enormous. The murmurs of violent party-men in oppoſite extremes are the ſtrongeſt preſumptions of the writer's veracity, and ſuperiority to bigotry civil or religious *. This, which was the laſt great work Dr. Leland engaged in, was firſt publiſhed in 1773.

Of thoſe who know nothing of Dr. Leland farther than what might be collected from the accounts hitherto given, ſome would ſuppoſe, from the quantity he is ſaid to have read and written, that

* This part of his character was conſpicuous, not only in his writings but in his conduct, particularly in the intercourſe wherein he lived with eſtimable men of oppoſite denominations.

they

they had been reading the life of a recluſe and abſtracted ſtudent; and others, that he had probably loſt ſight of his ſacred profeſſion (in a great degree at leaſt) amid ſuch a variety and extenſiveneſs of literary purſuits and objects: and each ſuppoſition would be wide of the truth. There were few men more active, more ſocial, or who converſed more with the world than he did. The number of perſons eminent for rank, abilities and character with whom he was acquainted, was greater than commonly falls to the lot of any except thoſe of high rank, ſtation, or large fortune. In his excurſions to England he aſſociated with many of thoſe whoſe names will do honour to their age and country; and with ſome of this deſcription he kept up a conſtant correſpondence. His general knowledge of life and manners, and acquaintance with the human heart, were of eſſential ſervice toward his excelling in the character in which we are now

coming

coming to consider him; that of a Preacher:

A CHARACTER towards attaining which his exertions were never intermitted. For he was not one of those "church-"men" of whom the satyrist complains, who

——— Scripture for the classics quit,
Polite apostates from God's grace to wit.

His early and earnest application to studies connected with religious and moral knowledge has been already mentioned: and to the large fund early acquired he was continually, or frequently, making additions. In the Deistical controversy, particularly, he was consummately skilled: and in some of his earlier discourses, composed for audiences and occasions where such topics were proper for the pulpit, he has, in a masterly manner, refuted some of the most celebrated infidel arguments, just

about

about the time of their firſt appearance, and before thoſe anſwers had come abroad that have been printed by others. There is reaſon to believe that he once had intentions of compleating an entire ſet of diſcourſes on the ſubject, but that he dropped the deſign. He ſtudied the eminent Engliſh divines and preachers largely and accurately; as appears from the critical accounts of their ſtyle and genius, their diſtinguiſhing excellencies and defects*, which he has given, in thoſe profeſſional lectures on oratory left behind him in manuſcript; ſeveral of which are particularly on the ſubject of pulpit eloquence. His converſe with theſe and with other of the graver and elder writers, thoſe "wells of Engliſh "undefiled," which modern indolence and faſtidiouſneſs neglect, had added a

* A taſk for which he was peculiarly qualified: as few men had the talent of pronouncing with ſo much judgment, preciſion, and readineſs, on the merit of any compoſition he heard or read.

richneſs

richneſs and dignity to a ſtyle formed in ſome meaſure to gravity and force by his tranſlating Demoſthenes; and through all a natural fervency of temper diffuſed an animating glow. Thus endowed, he did not act as if the '*ſcribe inſtructed*' was not to '*bring forth from his trea-*'*ſures.*' Even when under no peculiar or local tie of duty, in the midſt of whatever other ſtudies or purſuits engaged him, he made it a part, at leaſt, of his moſt ſerious employment, to defend, illuſtrate, recommend, and enforce religion. And before he had obtained any church preferment, he was conſidered as indubitably the beſt preacher of his time and country. To which reputation, beſides the merit of his compoſitions, a delivery at once ſtrictly proper and ſtrongly impaſſioned, muſt have materially contributed.

To theſe acknowledged abilities was, in ſome meaſure, owing his removal to

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the moſt conſpicuous clerical ſtation which he occupied. He had been in poſſeſſion of the prebend and vicarage before mentioned about five years, when Dr. Benjamin Domville, then Vicar of St. Anne's, Dublin, a pariſh of which a conſiderable part is inhabited by people of education and fortune, finding his health decline and grow unequal to the diſcharge of his duty according to his own ideas, wiſhed to retire to a benefice of more privacy: being poſſeſſed of a large property which made the difference in point of income between St. Anne's and the union of Rathmichael and Bray not an object of conſideration with him; and induced, partly by the circumſtance of his own eſtate being in the latter, and partly, as he avowed, by the talents of Dr. Leland, ſo adequate to fill worthily the place he deſired to reſign, he propoſed to our Author an exchange. The then Archbiſhop of Dublin, Dr. Cradock, had before this declared to Dr. Leland his

intention of conferring on him St. Anne's whenever it ſhould become vacant, as on a perſon qualified to pleaſe and edify ſuch a congregation, and thereby to do ſervice to the cauſe of religion. His Grace therefore readily conſented; and Dr. Leland was collated to the vicarage of St. Anne's, September 29, 1773.

From the time he became a pariſh miniſter he was unwearied and exemplary in the diſcharge of every part of his duty, and particularly that of a public inſtructor: and his entering on a cure of ſuch conſequence as St. Anne's was an additional ſtimulative to exertion. The number of manuſcript ſermons he has left behind him, ſhew with what unremitting aſſiduity he applied himſelf to this important part of his function. The volumes here given to the public are but a ſmall part of what he has left; and ſeveral, there is reaſon to think, he had himſelf deſtroyed. Nor does the ſtyle

bear

bear leſs honourable teſtimony to the zeal of the paſtor. The peculiar character which pervades and colours his diſcourſes, ſeems to be that of a ſtrong earneſtneſs, an intenſe effort to perſuade and to impreſs conviction, ſuitable to a teacher of doctrines, and enforcer of precepts, the awful importance of which is equal to their truth and fitneſs. The reader will not find language or matter choſen to diſplay the writer's taſte and ingenuity: none of that trite or cold ſpeculation, and meagre ſentiment, diſguiſed under an eternal affectation of delicacy of phraſe, or flimſy ornament every where overſpread; which may for a time gain the ſuffrage of the great vulgar and the ſmall, but muſt cauſe every hearer or reader of plain common ſenſe to feel the want of nature and of ſimplicity †. Sound ſenſe, clear and ſolid

† ——— *Liba recuſo.*
Pane egeo—mellitis potiore placentis. HOR.

reaſoning, juſt repreſentations of human life, and juſt obſervations on it, chriſtian argument and enforcement, and pathetic addreſs, in a nervouſneſs of expreſſion, and a ſonorouſneſs and dignity of compoſition, which rather ſeem the reſult of habit, than of caution and curious ſelection;—theſe are what the reader may expect, and theſe never diſgraced by vulgarity or littleneſs. In ſome inſtances the choice and manner of treating his ſubjects will ſhew with what judgment he adapted his topics and his diction to different auditories; and when we find him addreſſing the plaineſt in a manner perfectly levelled to their apprehenſions, we find his reaſonings dictated or directed by profound and accurate critical and philoſophical knowledge.

Dr. Leland continued in the uſeful and reſpectable ſtations of Vicar of St. Anne's and Senior Fellow and Oratory Profeſſor in Dublin College, until the year

year 1781; when he resigned his fellowship and professorship for the rectory of Ardstraw in the diocese of Derry, which is in the presentation of the College, and with which he continued to hold St. Anne's by a faculty. He, from that time, divided in some measure his residence. His country parish was a large and populous one. He preached, during his residence there, almost constantly; and composed several discourses purposely fitted to the spiritual wants of a rustic congregation. Many reasons would have induced him to spend a more considerable part of his time at Ardstraw: one was the failure, for a long time, of his voice, which disqualified him for the performance of his duty in so large a church as St. Anne's: another was the general decline of his health, which made country air more requisite. Had he continued in wholesome exercise and a purer atmosphere, perhaps so valuable a life might have

been

been prolonged; but the laws of the church, in virtue of which his return to Dublin was required by the present Archbishop, imposed a necessary obligation; and he accordingly returned to that capital in the winter of 1784. Then, an ague, which hung upon him a long time, ended, it is supposed, in a nervous atrophy, with some lethargic symptoms; and his strength and spirits continually decayed until August 1785: when he expired, with much composure and sentiments of truly Christian piety, in the sixty-third year of his age.

The reader will observe that he has been all along considered, principally, as a scholar, and a writer: the characters in which he is the object of public attention. His private life, his filial piety, his conjugal affection, his parental indulgence, his warmth in friendship, (all which virtues he possessed to an exalted degree) have not been touched upon: Nor

Nor that activity and integrity in the discharge of his public duties, which rendered him a most useful member of society. The object has been to trace the progress of his knowledge, attainments, and habits, as a man of letters; as an example for emulation, and a direction to those who chuse to distinguish themselves in that honourable, but arduous pursuit. Let such be informed —that the situation of a Fellow of Dublin College is not a soft and quiet retreat for the student, sheltered from all hurry and care, with all appliances and means to forward enquiry and repel distraction; but abounds with so many, however minute, calls to duty, to take a constant share in giving instruction, or aiding discipline, that he who performed the business of it alone, could not with justice be said to lead an idle life. That the learned labours, so great and various, which have been the subject of this account, were atchieved by a man,

to

to whom nature had given ſuch a diſpoſition to nervous diſorders, and ſuch a weakneſs of eyes from his childhood, as would have ſerved moſt men as an excuſe for total inapplication. That he ſacrificed to graver ſtudies, and painful reſearches, uſeful to mankind, and ſuitable to his character, the gratification of exerciſing talents for lighter ſallies of humour and imagination, which many a man would have made the foundation of his fame. That, ardent as was his purſuit of literary reputation, he was totally free from the weakneſs which ſo frequently diſgraces it, the jealouſy of like talents, and hatred '*for arts which* '*cauſed himſelf to riſe.*' On the contrary, he wiſhed to forward literary exertion; he urged to it, applauded it, and as far as was in his power cheriſhed it. Aſſiſtance and information he was always ready to give, even to thoſe who were proceeding in the ſame walk with himſelf, or who might be deemed powerful

rivals.

rivals*. That, laſtly, his excelling as he did is, in a great meaſure, to be attributed to an habit, or faculty, of following in literature a great politician's maxim in buſineſs, of 'doing one thing at a time.' Whatever work he engaged in concentrated his attention: he ſeemed abſorbed in it, to a degree ſcarce credible but to his more intimate acquaintance, who were witneſſes of it. It was thus that he could command, what Gray ſays are neceſſary to good writing, 'not only 'great parts, but the beſt of thoſe parts;' and devote them to the nobleſt employments in which the laudable ambition of a ſtudent can be exerted, the promotion of knowledge, of virtue, and of the glory of God.

* An obſervable inſtance of this is his ſupplying Lord Lyttleton with hiſtorical information, when the ſame remarkable events made ſo ſtriking a part of the ſeveral works in which each was engaged.

SERMONS.

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SERMON I.

Prevalence of Infidelity no Proof nor Presumption against Christianity.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

JOHN vii. 48.

Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?

THIS question was deemed sufficient to confound the witnesses of our Lord's power and wisdom, who had ingenuously acknowledged the manifestations of his divine authority. They had been commissioned by the chief priests and pharisees to seize him as a seducer, and to bring him before the great council, there to answer for his supposed impiety. They listened to his doctrine: they were

filled with reverence and admiration: "*no man laid hands on him:*" they return; and in the ardour of aſtoniſhment exclaim,—"*never man ſpake like this man!*" But here they are insulted as ignorant and vulgar, poſſeſſed with illiberal prejudices, and deceived by pretences which could have no effect on minds more enlightened. They are told of the deference due to the great and learned of their nation. The credulous multitude may aſk, "*When Chriſt cometh, will he* "*do more miracles than theſe?*" But what attention have theſe gained from men of eminence? The ignorant may ſay, "*of* "*a truth this is the prophet:*" but, "*have*" any of the great or learned, "*any of the rulers, or of the phariſees, be-* "*lieved on him?*

Many points of inſtruction might naturally be deduced from this paſſage. But it is my purpoſe to apply it to preſent times and occaſions in a manner more

more especially adapted to the circumstances of those who hear me.

THAT divine teacher, who spake as never man spake, still addresses his precepts, his exhortations, his promises, his threatenings, to us, in all wisdom and goodness, with all dignity and authority. The words of eternal life are HERE inculcated on the weak and inexperienced, "*precept upon precept, and line upon line*;" and it is their glory and their happiness (if they indeed "*continue in the things* "*which*" they have "*learned*" and been "*assured of*,") that each, "*from a child*," hath "*known the holy scriptures, which* "*are able to make him wise unto salvation.*" But the time may come when false teachers shall labour to "*turn away their* "*ears from the truth.*" And, to prepare the mind for other delusions, they may perhaps begin with these or some like insinuations.

"You have indeed been trained in "the practice of Christianity. You have "been taught to reverence its doctrines, "to cherish its hopes, and to dread its "threatenings. But, advancing as you "now are, to a more extensive know-"ledge of the world, what deference do "you find paid to these things, but by "the obscure and recluse, men whose "minds are fettered by prejudice, and "enslaved by authority? Do those of "liberal intercourse and exalted condi-"tion, appear at all influenced by what "you have been instructed to esteem so "sacred? Look round you to the men "of greatest reputation for science and "erudition. How many of these have "laboured to dispel those mists of errour, "in which superstitious ages have been "so long involved? Have they not all "vanished before the brightness of their "reasoning? Away then with the pre-"possessions of our childish days! And "let us freely follow the pleasurable

"paths

" paths of nature, unrestrained by the
" illusions of bigotry and pious fraud."

Inconsistent as it must appear for these pretenders to unbiassed reason, thus to recur to authority, the authority of weak and corrupted men; yet it may be necessary to guard the unwary against their artifice. For this purpose, I would now point your attention to that object which they display before us with so much triumph; the prevalence of unbelief among the great and learned. And the first point I would enforce is this, that

I. " It is by no means a presumption
" against the truth of our religion, that
" in the active and exalted scenes of life,
" men reject its authority, either by their
" practice or professions."

For the present, let us suppose the fact to be, as stated by the adversary. And, on the first view of society, there may

may appear ſome ground for the ſuppoſition. Although many who there ſupport characters of eminence, have, we truſt, received the fulleſt impreſſions of religion, and through all the tumult and agitation of this life, look ſteadily to the bleſſings of a more glorious exiſtence; yet the light of their examples is intercepted by the buſy crowd in which they are engaged. They who force themſelves on our attention, and from whom we generally form our judgment, are ſuch, as from their early days, have been directed only to the world and its enjoyments. Nurtured in pride and proſperity, with every ſeducing object preſented to their view, they iſſue into public life, with imaginations enflamed, paſſions undiſciplined, and underſtandings imperfectly cultivated. They may have gained thoſe ſuperficial acquirements which are thought to adorn their ſtations. In every art of elegance they may be deeply learned, and exquiſitely

refined,

refined. But the ſevere purſuit of ſolid knowledge is intolerable to the undiſciplined and enfeebled. And "*the words* "*of eternal life*," perhaps, have neither been impreſſed with due care, nor entertained with that ſatisfaction ſo neceſſary to their effectual improvement. Theſe men are placed in ſuch circumſtances as command reſpect and deference, without a ſcrupulous or rigorous diſcuſſion of their real merit. Their proſperity is intoxicating; they are countenanced and flattered by thoſe around them, who are attached to the ſame objects, and engaged in the ſame purſuits. Every inſtance in which their ſchemes have been ſucceſsful ſerves to confirm them in exalted notions of their own abilities, which have perhaps raiſed them to what they call honour and diſtinction. The buſtle of the little ſcene in which they are engaged keeps their minds in perpetual ferment; and their retired enjoyments, if in any degree licentious,

centious, leave neither leisure nor power for serious and exalted reflection.

WHATEVER deference may be due to such men, in our worldly intercourse; however distinguished their abilities may appear in those things which have engrossed their attention; yet surely, neither their situation nor engagements seem to qualify them to become detectors of religious errour. They may, without profound reflection, discover the advantageous influence of religion upon social life. They may speak of it with respect, as an instrument of policy, necessary for restraining the lower orders of mankind, yet still as an invention calculated merely for this purpose. In this decision, they may applaud their own discernment, and rejoice in their superiority to all mean prejudice and superstition. But before this decision can have any weight, either with themselves or others, there must be a conviction that it is founded, not

on

on a ſlight and careleſs advertence to the ſubject; not on ſome popular objection, ſome apparent difficulty caſually ſuggeſted and raſhly entertained; but on candid, ſerious, attentive, repeated examination. He who decides either in favour or in prejudice of a matter ſo momentous, on any other grounds, evidently forfeits all claim to our attention. It may be therefore worthy of enquiry, whether it be not highly probable that the men now deſcribed (and many ſuch there muſt be, of no ſmall regard in civil life,) never have examined the evidence of our faith; and whether it be not a ſubject which they ſcarcely can examine with attention and impartiality.

But theſe are points which ſeem, from the very nature of the caſe, to be at once decided.

The days of diſſipation and pleaſurable indulgence, are evidently not the

days

days of religious enquiry. It is not the buſineſs of a mind imperfectly cultivated, an imagination warm and giddy, paſſions violent, and ſolicited by perpetual allurements. The turbulence of public life leaves no leiſure for thoſe thoughts, which riſe beyond the ſphere of preſent objects, how intereſting ſoever and important they may appear. In what happy interval, can the man immerſed in the buſineſs, the contentions, and competitions of this world, be enabled or diſpoſed to conſider the things not of this world? Shall the word of truth, which he hath been habituated to deſpiſe, obtain at once, in any period of his engagemenrs, a ſerious and diſpaſſionate attention? Let us imagine him, in ſome moment of reflection, reading or converſing on the ſubject of religion. In either caſe, the humble preacher of righteouſneſs approaches him, without worldly dignity, without artifice or flattery. Could he aſſure him that the ſer-

vice

vice of God and that of the world were perfectly consistent; that they might go on in amicable union, without the least hazard of the divine displeasure, or the least interruption to the pursuits even of the most corrupt and sensual; he might possibly obtain a patient audience. But his preaching is of a different kind. He thwarts what such men consider as the business and the pleasures of their life, with doctrines the most disgusting. He tells them, that their pursuits, however captivating, are no more than "*vanity* "*and vexation of spirit*:" that high-minded as they may be, they have fixed on the most sordid objects; that they must mortify their corrupt affections, and look with a due indifference to the things of this world, while they press forward to an eternal inheritance.

But what acceptance can such doctrines gain, when the fastidious hearer is already prepossessed? Far from prevailing

vailing over inveterate habits, rooted prejudices and disordered passions, they must be received with aversion and indignation, as a presumptuous attempt to interrupt his favourite pursuits; with scorn and derision, as an insolent claim to a superiority in understanding, over those whom the world pronounces wise and discerning.

This preacher comes in the name of the great God of heaven and earth; and while he denounces the sentence of "*tribulation and anguish*," while he discloses the mystery of grace and mercy, offers at the same time the most reasonable evidence of the authority by which he speaks. But his doctrines are received with impatience and disgust; his evidence is weighed in the false balance of prejudice and corruption; with a desire to find it weak and insufficient. And let this fatal prepossession once engage the mind, the clearer the evidence appears,

pears, the more offensive must it prove; the more must it be hated, and, of consequence, the more violently opposed. Or, should it force its way through all the obstacles of depravity, it may be entertained for a while, but without a permanent and lively influence; vitious habits and disordered passions soon resume their power: and "*the last state of* "*that man*," now returning to his usual engagements, "*is worse than the first*."

Such is the natural progress of the contest between religion and corruption. But what is this to the cause of our holy faith? Is it impaired, or at all affected by the prejudices, by the passions, by the disorders and perversions of the human mind? Is truth of so precarious a nature, that it may be altered or subverted merely at the good pleasure of the negligent, the confident and presuming? Is the evidence of religion less bright, because the obstinate turn away from

from it? or its motives leſs powerful, becauſe ſinners reſiſt their influence?

And ſay not thou, that truth muſt have its due impreſſion on enlightened minds; and that the things rejected by the intelligent and enlightened cannot be true. Truth can make no impreſſion when it is not examined and conſidered; when it is excluded and rejected. We do not object to the certainty of a geometric theorem, becauſe the men engaged in other ſtudies will not purchaſe the knowledge of it by the neceſſary deductions, or becauſe their capacities are ſo contracted that they are not capable of the inveſtigation, or their diſpoſitions ſo averſe to abſtract reaſoning that they deſpiſe or deteſt it; or becauſe they coldly reject a ſtudy tending to interrupt their worldly purſuits. And as to the degree of underſtanding and illumination annexed to higher ſtations and engagements, we may not always judge of this

with

with impartiality and diſcernment. Whatever be the worldly employment to which we are attached, it neceſſarily contracts and concenters the mind to one favourite object. The politician is oftentimes as confined in his views, and as incapable of judging of any matter beyond his department, as the mechanic. In the eye of man, his engagements may be ſplendid and elevated, but they have their bounds as well as the leſs liberal employments; and beyond theſe the mind unuſed to paſs is darkened in the ſtrange and untrodden region.

The caſe of the men now deſcribed is the ſame with that of the unbelieving rulers in the days of our bleſſed Lord. Theſe had their corruptions and prepoſſeſſions, to which the doctrine of Jeſus was utterly unfriendly. Hence they either neglected or cavilled at this doctrine. The declarations of the prophets were explicit; but they refuſed to ſearch

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the ſcriptures. The evidence of miracles, though never beheld with indifference, yet, as in the days of their forefathers, proved by no means irreſiſtible. They tortured their invention to account for them, without doing violence to their prejudices: and they contented themſelves with the moſt irrational and abſurd ſolutions. Nay, we find them proceeding to an extravagance ſeemingly unnatural. When at the command of our Lord, the dead aroſe from his grave, and thus ſtupendouſly manifeſted the power of God, the glory of this evidence ſerved but to provoke their rage; and when they could no longer doubt or diſpute, they ſought to deſtroy the perſon on whom this miracle was wrought.

When, therefore, we attribute the diſregard or diſbelief of our religion, too frequently obſerved in the active and exalted orders of men, to their engagements, their paſſions, their corruptions

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and prepoſſeſſions, which render them inattentive to the evidence, and averſe from the doctrine of the goſpel, which incenſe them againſt the truth, and harden them againſt its influence, the cauſes we aſſign are fully ſufficient to account for this prevailing ſcandal; they are ſuch as, without any violence to chriſtian charity, ſeem naturally deduced from their circumſtances and engagements; and ſuch as, we are aſſured, have in other like inſtances operated with all the power we aſcribe to them.

And far be it from us, to urge them in the ſpirit of pride or conſcious ſuperiority. Even among thoſe who "*name the name* "*of Chriſt*," there is found an oppoſition to reaſon ſtill more affecting: I mean in thoſe who believe, and yet remain uninfluenced; who are forced by their paſſions from the paths of righteouſneſs, at the very time when they acknowledge theſe to be the only paths of truth and

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happineſs. And, more eſpecially, if among thoſe who have full leiſure to ſearch, to try, and to examine, who have no engagements or avocations, fewer trials and temptations to deviate from the religion which they profeſs, any ſhould prove indolent or obdurate, muſt we not acknowledge this a groſſer and more glaring contradiction to principle, than any to be found in the avowed gainſayer? He diſclaims and renounces the authority of his Lord and Maſter, and thus acts unreaſonably; but not inconſiſtently. He doth not acknowledge that authority, and at the ſame time reſiſt and defy it. He doth not "*confeſs* "*that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord*;" "*Lord of* "*Lords, and King of Kings*;" but he doth not, with the inſolent mockery of his murderers, crown him with the enſigns of royalty, and bow the knee before him. What ſtill aggravates the heinouſneſs of this diſcordance of the nominal chriſtian's conduct with the declaration

claration of his lips is, that the mischief terminates not in himself. He "*gives* "*occasion to the enemies of the Lord to* "*blaspheme.*" He is, in effect, "*the ene-* "*my of the Cross of Christ*;" by supporting and countenancing those who are formally and openly so. He adds to the illusions wherewith "*the children of this* "*world*" deceive themselves; who, priding themselves in their knowledge of mankind, triumph in every instance of such inconsistency in those who pretend to be "*children of light*;" and fortify themselves with the imaginary discovery, that men do not themselves believe what they attempt to obtrude on others.

But although it be allowed that the unbelief of the men, hitherto described, may fairly be imputed to a blinded understanding and an evil heart; still, what shall we say of those retired votaries of knowledge, those men of refinement and speculation, who have studied, examined,

and reject the gospel?——Let us in the second place consider, whether their authority be a proof or presumption against the truth of our religion.

II. And "*herein is a marvellous thing!*" that a religion first propagated in the midst of learning and refinement, tried at the tribunal of reason, approved by judicious and accurate enquiry, corrupted in times of darkness, recovering its purity with the revival of knowledge, strengthened and confirmed by the gradual increase of intellectual improvement, espoused and defended by the most illustrious in human science, should now at length be deemed the idol of ignorance and scorn of the wise!—But who are the wise that affect this scorn? Are they the attentive laborious prosecutors of knowledge; the glorious luminaries of science, who have spread its influence through the world; the illustrious sages who have directed and adorned society?

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In these our religion finds its most strenuous defenders. Or are they men who owe the greater part, if not the whole, of their reputation, to this their opposition to the gospel? If so, is there not reason to suspect that the gainsayer may be oftentimes extolled far beyond his real deserving? For, * MANY TALK OF THE TRUTH, WHO NEVER SOUNDED THE DEPTH FROM WHENCE IT SPRINGETH.

If he lives in the midst of superstition and idolatry, he may without any extraordinary abilities discover, that the religion of his country cannot be from God. He may point his ridicule against its corrupt doctrines with sufficient liveliness, and yet without any wonderful elevation of genius; just as he may point his invective against the cruelty of persecution, without any extraordinary or exalted benevolence. Yet still he

* HOOKER.

may

may not have the ingenuous caution and discernment necessary to distinguish the corruptions from the pure and essential parts of Christianity. He may wantonly extend his censure to these, and be admired; although he but repeats those arguments in one country, which have been repeatedly and effectually refuted in another.

Where religion is professed in greater purity, he may find doctrines which shock the pride of reason, and may glory in that freedom which examines them without reserve or scruple. Yet he may be precipitate enough to confound the doctrines which transcend, with those which contradict his reason: or he may deride the trite distinction. Yet it may not be the less just, because frequently repeated. He may be offended at the endless subjects of religious controversy, in a state of religious liberty: He may conclude that every system is equally false. Yet

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this may be the conclusion of a rash, an indolent, an inattentive reasoner. And genius and understanding do not always secure against rashness, indolence, and inattention.

In general we know, that an inferiour degree of intellectual powers is sufficient for objecting, perplexing, and confounding. In times more distinguished for the superficial elegancies of knowledge, than for deep enquiry and collected reasoning, even this inferiour degree may be admired and applauded. And he who employs his abilities of whatever rank or degree, in opposition to our faith, hath already gained the whole tribe of the corrupt and vitious, a powerful party, in his favour. Prejudiced, and partial to the advocates of their folly, they easily mistake an affected ostentatious delicacy, for liberality of sentiment; a livelinesſ and extravagance of fancy for acuteness and penetration; bold assertion for argument

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and knowledge; fluent elocution for juſt reaſoning; darkened ſubtilty for deep and critical diſquiſition: and becauſe theſe men have not been convinced, they may raſhly and ignorantly conclude that they have never been confuted. Raſhly, I ſay, and ignorantly; for arguments the moſt powerful cannot always have their due influence: nor can conviction operate on minds indiſpoſed to the truth.

And may not men of ſcience and ſpeculation be ſubject to the ſame indiſpoſitions with the active part of mankind? Are not their minds equally liable to be prejudiced againſt the truth; their hearts equally liable to be alienated from it; their tempers equally liable to be incenſed againſt it?——Let it not be deemed invidious to obſerve, that they who contend againſt the authority of our religion, may not always be unexceptionable in their moral conduct. This may be no

conſiderable

conſiderable impediment to their purſuit of human knowledge. The vitious man of intellectual abilities, may proceed in a mathematical diſquiſition with the utmoſt regularity. He can here judge of evidence exactly, detect a fallacy moſt acutely, and ſteer his courſe ſucceſsfully through the moſt perplexed and difficult reſearches. His paſſions do not attend him in his progreſs; and are by no means intereſted in his concluſions. Whatever he may collect, or however he may decide, his ſenſuality is not condemned, his pride is not mortified, his malice is not reſtrained. He hath, therefore, no temptation to deviate from the exact line of reaſon and evidence. Not ſo in his religious enquiries. When he is to enquire into the truth and divinity of the Goſpel, with all its precepts of purity and meekneſs, and benevolence, the queſtion, in effect, at leaſt in its immediate conſequence, is nothing leſs than whether the purſuits of all his days have not been

vain

vain and abominable; whether the judgments of the Almighty be not denounced against them; whether he ſhould not ſubdue thoſe affections which now enſlave him, and humble himſelf before his fellow creature, who hath been injured by his inſolence or oppreſſion. In ſuch enquiries, neither knowledge nor refinement, nor penetration, can render ſuch men competent judges. For "*while they pretend to ſuch a ſcrutiny of other evidence,*" (to uſe the words of one of their own order *) "*they are the readieſt to take the* "*evidence of the greateſt deceivers in the* "*world, their own paſſions.*" And to this, I fear, we are in a great meaſure to impute it, that there is no one ſpecies of falſe and ſophiſtical argument, of ſubterfuge, artifice, and cavil, perplexity, confuſion, and inconſiſtency, but abounds in their reaſonings, who are deemed the moſt diſtinguiſhed in the cauſe of infidelity.

EVERY

* LORD SHAFTSBURY.

Every occupation or profeſſion hath its peculiar diſtempers, of the mind as well as of the body: Men of ſpeculation experience both. Let us ſuppoſe a caſe which frequently occurs, and which ſurely renders the ſufferer an object of tendereſt compaſſion. Suppoſe the brilliancy of genius clouded, and the native vigour of the mind relaxed by an exquiſite ſenſibility tremblingly alive to every gloomy or diſagreeable impreſſion. The man of this irritable mind and this relaxed frame is querulous, reſtleſs, diſſatisfied; he repines, he accuſes the author of what he calls his miſery; he cannot bear theſe chearful views of Providence with which chriſtianity preſents him. He pronounces them falſe, for they accord not with his immediate feelings. Suppoſe him more chearful and more converſant with the world: He has been habituated to regard thoſe exceſſes condemned ſo ſeverely by the goſpel without abhorrence. His habits, his ſelf-will, and

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ſelf-flattery, determine him againſt thoſe doctrines which ſuppoſe or expreſs the exceeding heinouſneſs of his conduct, and which, if true, muſt render him debaſed and loathſome in his own ſight.

Let us ſuppoſe, however, that theſe ſpeculative men who have at any time contended againſt our faith, were not under the dominion of the more diſordered paſſions: that they have really acquired that philoſophical refinement and compoſure, which they ſometimes affect. Still there are paſſions no leſs enemies to truth, though their objects be not merely ſenſual. Do not the love of fame, the vanity of being diſtinguiſhed, the impatience of being careſſed and admired, the hope of being tranſmitted to poſterity, as the great reformers of a ſuperſtitious world, the conquerours of general prejudice, and the victorious combatants of errour; do not theſe pervert the judgment? And ſurely men are not

defended

defended from them by ſcience and erudition.

Few there are who do not over-rate their intellectual powers; who do not ſecretly exult in a conſcious ſuperiority over thoſe around them. And how ſhall this ſuperiority be diſplayed? In times when every art and ſcience have been improved to the utmoſt, what reſource for the man who aſpires to literary diſtinction? New improvements in the uſeful arts, or new diſcoveries in human ſcience, it would be intolerable, it would be precarious, it would be hopeleſs, to attempt. The aſpiring and the confident therefore ſtrike naturally into the path of oppoſition to opinions generally held ſacred. The moſt eminent in human knowledge have aſſerted and defended them. To deny them, therefore, is to enter the liſts with the moſt eminent in human knowledge; an object highly flattering to vanity and ſelf-opinion.—

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If these passions be not eminently discoverable in the "*disputer of this world*," what meaneth his perpetual glorying in his own wisdom? His affected contempt and rigorous censure of all those whom he opposes? To what can we ascribe his precipitate and peremptory decisions on the nature of the Infinite and unsearchable, and the ways of his adorable Providence? His extravagant paradoxes, those feeble efforts of a perverse mind, that is plunged into absurdity, by straining at something new and extraordinary? Or what hath given birth to his laboured attempts at subtilty and sceptical refinement, obtruded with all the triumph of confidence and self-conceit? Or (to appeal to an indisputable fact) what but vain-glory prompts our adversary to propagate his unbelief? When the advocate for religion stands forth in its defence, he may be accused of interested or sinister motives: But he hath a fair and reasonable

able account to render of his conduct. He pleads that it is his bounden duty and ſervice; and that he labours for the temporal and eternal intereſts of his fellow-creatures. But when the adverſary diſplays his untoward zeal, what can he reply to the charge of vain-glory? Not that he obeys the commands of God, when he denies or doubts his exiſtence, or declares that this adorable Being beholds not "*the things that are on earth.*" Not that he "*looks to the recompence of* "*reward*;" for he hopes but to lie down with the beaſts that periſh. Not that he reveres and vindicates the Majeſty of Heaven. The hideous vanity of ſuch a plea is at once diſcoverable in the man, who wantonly miſtates, or raſhly miſconceives thoſe particulars, which he preſumes to call injurious to this Majeſty. Nor can he pretend a concern for the welfare of ſociety, when he oppoſes a religion of peace and benevolence, the moſt effectual ſupport, and brighteſt ornament

nament of ſocial life: When he labours to break down the ſureſt barrier againſt violations of right and order, to ſubvert the moſt powerful motives to every laudable purſuit, to ſtifle the remorſe of the oppreſſor, to aggravate the ſorrows of the afflicted, to harden the already hardened heart, and to thunder deſpair into the ear, in which humanity ſhould infuſe the faireſt hopes and tendereſt conſolations.

WHENEVER, therefore, it is urged that many wiſe, and many contemplative, and many men of knowledge and refinement, have oppoſed our holy faith, let it be remembered, that the wiſe man hath his weakneſs and imperfections, the contemplative and refined their prejudices and perverſions. But whether the deſpiſers of God's holy law, wilfully ſhut their eyes againſt the conſequences of their preſumption; or whether they deceive their own hearts; it is our part

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to be guarded against the danger of their example. For this purpose I have now endeavoured to inculcate that principle, for which they affect to contend with so much zeal; that you are not to be influenced by authority; but to labour freely and dispassionately in the search of truth: that you are not to be offended, because men are found indifferent to what they have not examined, or are incapable of examining; because they are averse to a doctrine mortifying to their pride, and odious to their corruptions; or because the superficial, the vitious, or the vain-glorious pretender to speculation hath contended against it. Doth this little band of gain-sayers seem considerable enough to demand your attention? Behold, then! we claim your attention for a society infinitely more numerous and venerable. We set before you the glorious company of apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the redeemed of all nations and ages, the assembly of

Christ's faithful followers, who have sprung up even in the most corrupted times; the good and the wise, and the learned, in whose lives and labours his heavenly doctrine hath shone out gloriously and irresistibly. With one voice they call upon you; they adjure you by the mercies of the living God, to use all diligence "*to make your calling and* "*election sure:*" not to submit blindly and implicitly, but to try, to prove, to exercise that portion of reason, to embrace those opportunities of instruction which God hath granted you, before the distractions of the world have dissipated, before its allurements have seduced, before corruption and vanity have blinded and perverted you.

LISTEN to the awful admonition. So shall the "*God of all grace stablish,* "*strengthen, settle you*" in a steadfast and a lively faith; that faith which shall preserve you "*blameless and harmless*" amidst

amidſt "*a perverſe generation*;" which ſhall make every action of your lives gracious and amiable, and prove at once your guide and comfort through the perplexities and dangers, and calamities of of this mortal ſtate; which ſhall raiſe you to the glory for which you were created and redeemed; to the eternal inheritance of the ſons of God, through Chriſt, our Lord.

SERMON II.

Proof of Christianity from Miracles.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

PART I.

ST. JOHN, iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

THIS ingenuous concession of the Jewish ruler we are not to consider as the mere effect of sudden rapture and surprise. We are to regard it, as the calm, serious, deliberate, and just deduction of reason and reflection. And it is a method of reasoning so natural

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and obvious, ſo conſonant to our uncorrupted notions both of God and man, that the teacher of God's word, when he is to examine this great foundation of our faith, might fairly hope that his office was no more than to point out its ſtrength and ſtability, to explain that force of evidence by which the Goſpel-miracles are eſtabliſhed, to exhort the faithful to ſteadineſs and perſeverance, and to unite with them in grateful and humble adoration of that Being who wrought ſuch wonderful things for our ſalvation.

But the "*darkener of counſel*," hath unhappily rendered our taſk more tedious and perplexed. He labours to entangle us in all the wiles and ſubtilties of affected refinement. He tells us, that we are precipitate; that we are deceived; that, in arguing from miraculous facts to the divine authority of the Agent, or of his doctrines, we aſſume thoſe things

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as proved, which no evidence whatever can eſtabliſh; and deduce a concluſion not at all connected with our premiſes; nor fairly deducible from theſe, were it even admitted that they could be proved.

And as the matter is confeſſedly of the utmoſt moment, you cannot refuſe your attention, while, to obviate all ſuſpicion of dealing deceitfully with you, we follow the adverſary through the intricacies of his ſpeculation, and purſue the very method he hath pointed out. It ſhall therefore be my preſent buſineſs to ſhew,

Iſt, That miracles in themſelves imply no impoſſibility; and are therefore capable of rational proof. And,

IIdly, That miracles, ſo proved, may afford the cleareſt and moſt forcible evidence,

dence, that he who performs them, is really a teacher ſent from God.

When theſe points have been eſtabliſhed, nothing can remain, but to review the poſitive evidence of thoſe miracles recorded in the Goſpel, in order to our being convinced that we have not followed cunningly-deviſed fables, and to our being poſſeſſed with thoſe affections naturally ariſing from a ſerious and devout conviction of the ſtrength of our faith, and ſtedfaſtneſs of our hope.

I. First then, I am to ſhew that miracles imply no impoſſibility, and are therefore capable of rational proof.

They who are hardy enough to deny this propoſition have yet not aſſerted, or at leaſt have not attempted to ſhew, that the notion of a miracle in itſelf is contradictory or inconſiſtent.—That a dead

dead man ſhould be inſtantly reſtored to life, is as conceivable as that a living one ſhould inſtantly die.—That a heavy body ſhould be ſuſpended in air by an inviſible power, is as conceivable as that its gravity ſhould be counteracted by any natural force.—That the blind ſhould be made to ſee, the lame to walk, or the diſeaſed to recover health; whatever extraordinary cauſe we may aſſign for ſuch effects, the effects themſelves may be ſuppoſed, without any violence to our faculties. We do not aſſert that a man may be alive and dead at the ſame time; that a body may be of a quite different nature and properties from thoſe exhibited to our ſenſes; or that the ſame individual may occupy ten thouſand different places, at the ſame inſtant. We only contend that an event may be produced in a manner evidently different from what we call the courſe of nature; and evidently demonſtrating the extraordinary interpoſition of the Great Author

thor and Director of this course. And they who deny it are reduced to shew that such a manner of working is inconsistent with his attributes.

As it is not in itself a contradiction, we must pronounce it an object of power: And whatever be the object of power, Omnipotence surely may perform: Should it be asserted, that 'we can infer nothing of the power of God but 'from what we see and experience; that 'these effects are the measure of their 'cause,' (as our adversaries sometimes speak) 'and that we have no ground 'to believe that he can act in any manner different from that in which his 'agency is generally manifested,' — this were to degrade the Lord of Nature into a mere necessary and physical cause; that is, in effect, to deny his existence. Such assertions therefore we reject with scorn; nor do we address ourselves to those who do not acknowledge the infinitely wise

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and powerful Author and Governor of the world. By his word was it made, and by the perpetual influence of his Providence is the whole collection of created beings preſerved and directed. No greater power is required to ſuſpend, than to preſerve their courſe; no greater effort, to effect his gracious purpoſes by an extraordinary interpoſition, than by the regular and ordinary progreſs of natural cauſes. This is too evident to require proof or illuſtration. So that the queſtion really is, whether it may be ſuppoſed that God *will*, in any caſe, order or permit a deviation from that regular courſe which his wiſdom hath appointed. A queſtion which is at once decided in our favour, if we can point out any final cauſe worthy of ſuch extraordinary diſpenſations. What his power can effect, his wiſdom and goodneſs may then appoint; nor can his immutability be impeached by thoſe deviations from the general ſyſtem, which

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upon the present supposition were foreseen and fore-ordained: and which, together with the ordinary methods of his Providence, operate consistently and uniformly to the purposes of grace and wisdom.

Suppose the reasoning of our adversaries should have prevailed, and influenced the whole race of mankind: That they were universally persuaded, that the material world had in itself some inherent principles of motion and activity, independent of the operating spirit; or that the Divinity was bound by those general laws of nature which he hath established; or that he were not free to act in any manner different from what we see and experience. Let us not presume to say what must be the methods of his providence in such a case; but let it not be asserted, with still greater presumption, that he could not rescue us

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from this ſtate of darkneſs by ſome miraculous interpoſition, ſo as to awaken us to a lively ſenſe of his perfections, and to give us ſtriking conviction that he is "*the moſt high*," the ſupreme Diſpoſer and Governor of the creation.

Suppose, again, the race of mankind generally corrupted and perverted; wandering in the miſts of ſuperſtition, eſtranged from the knowledge of true religion, poſſeſſed with the moſt unworthy notions of God; taught to ſubſtitute the moſt horrid, abſurd, and ſhameful practices in the place of his reaſonable ſervice: while the very few, leaſt infected, were yet doubtful, wavering, ignorant of thoſe points in which their happineſs is moſt eſſentially concerned; trembling under the piercing ſenſe of their own unworthineſs, yet utterly undirected to the means of reconciliation: inſtinctively preſſing forward, in their imaginations, beyond the narrow

narrow limits of this life; yet recalled by the fears of lying down with the beasts that perish. In this case of universal errour and corruption, ignorance and distraction, let us not presume antecedently to determine in what manner the Divine Perfections must be manifested to such a fallen race. But when it is asserted, upon the utmost moral evidence, that the Divine mercies *have* been manifested, in preparing mankind for a deliverance from this wretched state by a series of miraculous dispensations, and at length in sending the messenger of glad tidings endued with power from on high, to attest his mission by such miracles as "*no man can do except God* "*be with him*;" let it not be objected, with still greater presumption, that, in such case, and for a purpose of such moment, this miraculous attestation is impossible, or incredible.

THEY

They who would ſeduce you from the acknowledgment of the truth, while they magnify the violence to the courſe of nature in thoſe wonderful works which we aſſert, withdraw your attention from thoſe extraordinary occaſions and important purpoſes which we aſſign for ſuch works.——'Suppoſe,' ſay they, 'that all hiſtorians that treat of a particular country ſhould agree, that on 'ſuch a day ſuch a particular monarch 'of that country died: A ſucceſſor was 'acknowledged and proclaimed; and 'that, after having been interred for a 'month, the ſame monarch again ap'peared and governed for three years. 'We might be ſurpriſed at the concur'rence of ſo many odd circumſtances, 'but ſhould not have the leaſt incli'nation to believe ſo miraculous an 'event.'

No, certainly! but not merely from the extraordinary nature of the fact thus

atteſted. We ſhould not at once pronounce it impoſſible to Divine power. But we might reflect that the concurrence of all the hiſtorians of one particular country doth not neceſſarily riſe to the higheſt degree of moral evidence. All theſe hiſtorians may really be few in number. They may be all under ſome unhappy influence of intereſt or paſſion. They may have copied from one original: ſo that their authority may amount to nothing more than the teſtimony of a ſingle perſon. The circumſtances of credibility attending this teſtimony are not ſtated. We are not informed that there were numbers of eye-witneſſes to the death and reſurrection of this monarch; that there were any ſtanding records or public memorials of his government, after he had thus riſen. But, above all things, no cauſe whatever is aſſigned for ſuch an extraordinary exertion of Divine power. A miracle is ſuppoſed without reaſon, purpoſe, or

consequence. And then indeed, miraculous and absurd, miraculous and impossible, may be (as our adversary always makes them) terms of the same import. But suppose a person said to be sent from Heaven to instruct mankind in the will of God, to rescue them from ignorance and misery, and to guide them to eternal happiness. He appears at the time foretold: he publishes his holy laws; he performs such works as we are taught to expect from him; and, among other wonderful attestations of his mission, he appeals to one final and consummate proof, on which he rests the whole of his veracity: "*Destroy this* "*temple* [*of my body*] *and I will raise it* "*in three days:*" It is accordingly attested by the amplest evidence, that he did rise at the time foretold. And shall such evidence only serve to surprise and confound us? On such an occasion, and for such a purpose, "*Why should it be*

" *thought incredible that God ſhould raiſe* ' *the dead?*

And here, by the way, we may obſerve the futility of that aſſertion, that ' there is a peculiar preſumption againſt ' thoſe miracles, above all others, which ' are ſaid to have been wrought in ſup- ' port of a religious ſyſtem.' As if it were leſs probable that the Divine power ſhould be miraculouſly exerted on an occaſion of the higheſt moment, than for ſome cauſe of leſs importance. The dignity of the occaſion, on the contrary, creates a peculiar preſumption in favour of ſuch miracles, as extraordinary means are obviouſly beſt ſuited to extraordinary ends.

' The author of a religious ſyſtem,' we are told, ' may be an enthuſiaſt, ' may forge and falſify for what he ' deems a good cauſe, may be vain or ' ſelf-intereſted.' True: but from ſuch

ſuſpicions

ſuſpicions are we at once to reject his evidence? Surely ſuch precipitation is unworthy a philoſopher. He who deſerves this name would proceed to weigh and to examine the evidence on every ſide with a ſcrupulous caution and attention. But in all this critical inveſtigation he muſt acknowledge, that what is poſſible is capable of being proved by teſtimony; that the value of teſtimony, as it may be leſſened by circumſtances, characters of the witneſſes, or the nature of human paſſions, ſo, it may be increaſed by theſe; and that combinations of them may raiſe it to any conceivable degree. 'No!' it is replied, 'no human teſtimony can aſſure us that miracles have been wrought in ſupport of a religious ſyſtem.'—'The credibility of human teſtimony,' it is ſaid, 'is founded on experience of its general veracity. Suppoſe then the teſtimony for any miraculous fact amounts to a full proof. Experience, which gives

'this proof its force, doth also fully 'assure us of the laws of nature. When 'therefore these two kinds of experience 'are contrary, we are to subtract the 'one from the other, and embrace an 'opinion on one or the other side with 'that assurance which arises from the 'remainder. But the subtraction of one 'full proof from another amounts to an 'entire annihilation. And therefore we 'may establish it as a maxim, that no 'human testimony can have such force 'as to prove a miracle, and to make it 'a foundation for a religious system.'

Here is the grand discovery, the everlasting check to superstitious delusion, the decisive argument which must silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition, and free us from their impertinent solicitations, which is to retain its usefulness and importance as long as the world endures: and to reduce us at once to the miserable alternative of renouncing

cing our faith, or resigning our reason! Perplexed and embarrassed as it may be, since it assumes an air so magisterial and decisive, let us not disdain to examine it by the light of plain, unsophisticated sense and reason.

'The evidence of testimony is founded on experience.'—Previous to experience then, the amplest attestation hath no influence upon the mind: Competent witnesses of any fact whatever afford no ground for assenting to it: The young and unobservant, as least experienced, must be of all most incredulous, most slow, and cautious in assenting: The old and more conversant in general observation, must yield to testimony, with the readiest and most implicit confidence. Here then we have a principle of philosophy directly contradicted by the most obvious and notorious appearances in human nature. The real state of the matter is, that man is conscious

of

of an inherent inſtinctive love of truth; feels an innate ſhame and confuſion at being detected in falſhood; is naturally diſpoſed to confide in the aſſurances of his fellow-creatures; a diſpoſition not controuled, 'till repeated obſervation and experience have convinced him that the connexion between truth and teſtimony is by no means invariable. But his utmoſt prudence and caution cannot deny aſſent to any teſtimony however circumſtanced: it leads him to weigh the circumſtances with a care and accuracy proportioned to the difficulties and importance of the caſe before him: and where no reaſonable ground of objection can be detected, God hath ſo formed him, that he is in many inſtances as reſigned to teſtimony, and as powerfully influenced by it, in the moſt important parts of his conduct, as by the informations even of his own ſenſes. On this conſtitution of our nature depends a conſiderable part of human happineſs,

of our knowledge civil and philoſophical, of our ſocial connexions, diſtinctions, and enjoyments.

Try the force of teſtimony in caſes ever ſo unuſual and unexperienced. Here we are indeed cautious, but it is in examining the ſeveral circumſtances of its credibility; and when once ſatisfied in theſe, of little force would be the ſubduction of ten thouſand negative experiences (as we may call them) from one clear and poſitive proof. Aſk the naturaliſt if he at once rejected the firſt clear, circumſtantial, and well-atteſted accounts of the electric fire, becauſe the experiments of ages had not exhibited any ſuch appearance: or if he ever conſidered theſe as experiments either in oppoſition, or in favour of the point atteſted. We have lately heard the report revived that ſome of the ſouthern parts of America are inhabited by men of a gigantic ſize. Suppoſe the fact fully atteſted: and common ſenſe will aſſure you, that you would not ſtill

perſiſt

persist in pronouncing it impossible, because never proved before: or because the race of mankind had hitherto been always found of our own stature.

Suppose again, the facts attested are miraculous. They are fully proved. 'Still 'we are not to assent to them; for they 'are opposed by another proof as entire 'as that of testimony can be, the firm 'and unalterable experience which esta-'blishes the laws of nature.' Let us examine the import of these terms. Do they mean, that the laws of nature have been ever invariably experienced to proceed in the regular course we now observe, without the least deviation or suspension in any time or place whatever? Then it is an assumption of the very point to be proved: And all the boasted subtilty dwindles at once into this puerile assertion, that there never was a miracle, because there never was a miracle.—Or, are we to understand, that the same course of natural things hath

hath been experienced, in general, uniform and regular? This, indeed, is all that can be concluded from the moſt extenſive experience. And far from denying it (which would be futile and ridiculous) we aſſert and ſuppoſe it. It is implied in the very nature of a miracle. There muſt be an ordinary and regular courſe, before we can ſuppoſe any extraordinary deviation from it; nor can we prove, that any appearance is really miraculous, unleſs it be granted that the general courſe of nature hath been ever one and the ſame. They are facts by no means inconſiſtent or contradictory. Contend as we may for the general uniformity of nature, we do not invalidate the evidence of preternatural events: Clear as may be the evidence of theſe in ſome few inſtances, the concurrent teſtimony of mankind to the courſe of nature remains ſtill unſhaken. In vain then would we oppoſe two points which ſtand in fair agreement and connexion,

nexion with each other. Torture the evidence of each by any fanciful operations whatſoever, and it ſtills retains its full weight. Subtract the one from the other, and you ſubtract nothing at all. The ſum on either ſide ſtill remains entire and unimpaired.

So that the utmoſt ſubtilty proves utterly ineffectual againſt the credibility of miracles, until it be proved that they are in themſelves impoſſible. But I truſt it hath appeared clearly that the notion of a miracle is neither abſurd nor contradictory: That a power may be aſſigned ſufficient to effect it, and a cauſe of ſufficient dignity to juſtify the moſt extraordinary exertions of that power. The conſequence is obvious and neceſſary. That miracles are, like other facts, the object of rational enquiry, and in themſelves capable of being eſtabliſhed by proper evidence.

And here let us consider the striking difference between the reasonings of our adversaries, and the evidence of our Holy Faith. In the one is deceit, perplexity, and presumption; an outrageous defiance of the common and uncorrupted notions of mankind. In the other ingenuous, plain, and satisfactory reasoning, solid argument, powerful conviction. "*Whoso is simple, let him turn* "*in hither securely*," It is "*a highway*, "*and the wayfaring man shall not err* "*therein*." In listening to the adversary we are confounded, distracted, darkened. But the word of truth is light and comfort. "*Stand ye therefore in the* "*ways, and see and ask for the old paths*, "*where is the good way, and walk therein*; "*and ye shall find rest for your souls*."

II. They who do not affect subtilty and metaphysical perplexity, have yet offered some further objections against the evidence of miracles. They deny that

that in their nature they can be proofs of any doctrine; and, in the case of our Blessed Lord, they deny that they were wrought for this purpose. Against these objections of the adversary I am now to arm you. They have been urged, refuted, repeatedly advanced, and, for the sake of the less-experienced, should be again repelled.

In the first place it is asked, 'What 'though the Gospel miracles be ever so 'credible, or ever so powerfully attested, 'yet what connexion between the truth 'of a miracle and the truth of a doc-'trine?'—This question, however captiously proposed, will receive a sufficient answer, by considering the proposition which I am now to establish—That miracles, duly attested, may afford the clearest and most forcible evidence that he who performs them is really "*a* "*teacher come from God.*"

And

And here we assume as granted what, to the utter confusion of the gainsayer, hath been repeatedly demonstrated with all the force of conviction, and what indeed appears most evidently from a simple appeal to the history of mankind: I mean, the expediency of a Divine Revelation, to restore a fallen race to that degree of moral perfection in which they were originally created. Now, there are but two conceivable methods, in which the will of God may be positively revealed: either by an immediate influence on the mind of every individual; or by particular teachers chosen to declare the good pleasure of God, speaking in his name, and vested with his authority. The first of these methods appears to us liable to objections of weight; of peculiar weight with those who are so reluctant in assenting to miracles. But our reasonings in such matters seem impertinent at least, if not presumptuous. Sufficient for us, that God hath not been

pleased

pleaſed to diſpenſe his mercies in this manner. When it is alledged, that he hath ſpoken to us by his choſen meſſengers, our part is no more than to examine the atteſtations of their miſſion, and when aſſured of theſe, to accept the glad tidings with joy and gratitude. But vanity, enthuſiaſm, or ſelf-intereſt may tempt a man to aſſume ſuch a character without due authority. The diſcuſſion of his pretenſions is to us a point of moment; it requires the moſt deliberate and cautious ſcrutiny. What then are the credentials by which ſuch a meſſenger may approve the divinity of his miſſion?

We are ſometimes directed, firſt to conſider the meſſage itſelf which he delivers, the general purport and tendency of that doctrine which he preaches in the name of God. But it ſeems not ſo certain that this mode of proceeding is univerſally juſt and proper. When miracles are immediately wrought, and directly

rectly ſubmitted to men's ſenſes, attention and reverence to the Great Agent are powerfully excited; the manifeſtation of Divine power may be ſo forcible, as to extort an immediate acknowledgment. And this appears to have been the caſe of Nicodemus. He did not firſt weigh the doctrine of our Lord, and then acknowledge the authority of his works. From theſe he firſt inferred his authority, and then reſorted to him to learn his doctrine. And in the caſe of great blindneſs and ſtrong prejudice, where the principles and practices of mankind are corrupt, in vain would they be directed, firſt to uſe their reaſon in trying a revealed doctrine, before they ſhould yield to the ſenſible demonſtration of Divine authority. In the preſent circumſtances of the Chriſtian world, indeed, where the doctrine and its authority are at once laid before us, we may more ſecurely follow the method above preſcribed; provided we proceed with caution

tion and ingenuousness, not rashly and presumptuously rejecting some particular part of the doctrinal system at once, in defiance of its extrinsic evidence, because not perfectly understood, or not entirely conformable to our preconceived opinions. With this caution and limitation, I say, we may first examine whether the system to which our assent is demanded as on the authority of the Infinitely Wise, and Good, and Pure, of "*the High and* "*Holy One*," appear plainly, certainly, and in its main tendency frivolous or absurd, iniquitous or impure, repugnant to our natural sentiments of good and evil, or derogatory to the Divine Perfections manifested in the works of nature: if so, we are to turn away from it with abhorrence, though all the powers of darkness were permitted to make trial of our integrity by signs and lying wonders. If, on the other hand, the system proposed appears in its general nature, weighty and reasonable, just, pure, and benevolent,

benevolent, evidently tending to the regulation, improvement, and perfection of our nature, it then claims our moſt ſerious attention.

But the intrinſic excellence of a religious ſyſtem doth not at once eſtabliſh its divine authority. It proves that it may be, not that it is immediately revealed by God. Suppoſe it to conſiſt merely of the precepts of natural religion delivered in the utmoſt purity.—'I receive it,' ſaith the falſe friend, 'upon the moſt certain character of all, its utility, its holineſs, and all thoſe qualities which announce to man the inſtructions of ſupreme wiſdom, and the precepts of ſupreme goodneſs. Here is the infallible character, the proof that renders all others uſeleſs.'—But what doth this proof amount to? That a teacher who aſſerts that he hath been immediately commiſſioned by God to inſtruct mankind, inculcates ſuch doc-

trines as are entirely consonant to the Law of Nature.—Doth it follow that his system is, therefore, an actual solemn republication of that Law? He is a wise and good man. Is he, therefore, (and by a parity of reasoning, every other wise and good man) a person infallibly directed, and invested with the plenitude of divine authority? The slightest reflection will satisfy us, that no sober reasoner could argue thus. The suspicions of mankind, on the contrary, would be here awakened. We are not formed with such easiness of submission, as to yield at once to him who assumes a character so exalted. While reason could infer nothing of his immediate commission, from the moral excellence of his doctrine, there would still remain a field for unfavourable conjecture. Who can say but that he may pretend a divine mission from motives of policy?—— What assurance have we of his veracity in this particular point? These are questions

tions as yet to be decided.——And ſhould his ſyſtem contain ſome doctrines not deducible from reaſon, ſome poſitive inſtitutions which reaſon might not ſuggeſt, (and ſuch may be expected in an extraordinary revelation) the tendency of ſuch doctrines, as far as we can comprehend them, may appear good and excellent: The nature and purpoſe of ſuch inſtitutions may be deemed wiſe and ſalutary. But the authority on which they claim our acceptance ſtill remains to be aſcertained.

He then who ſpeaks to mankind in the name of God, muſt give ſenſible and ſtriking proof that "*God is with him.*" He declares that he is more than a good and wiſe man; an inſpired and infallible Prophet. The truth of ſuch a declaration is not as yet evident. His hearers may indeed be prejudiced in his favour, but as they cannot try the heart, ſuch prejudice doth not as yet warrant an im-

plicit ſubmiſſion. They naturally demand a proof of his ſincerity. He appeals to God; and God heareth and acknowledgeth his Prophet, by enabling him to perform ſuch wonderful works as demonſtrate the divine ſupport and interpoſition. Of the being and perfections of the Almighty, we have plain and ſenſible evidence in the works of nature: of the authority of the law of nature, we have plain and ſenſible evidence in the general conſtitution of things. But an immediate revelation of God's will is diſtinct and different from his ordinary operations. Its atteſtation, therefore, muſt be diſtinct and extraordinary; yet plain and evident, as that of any truth derived from natural reaſon: and then we receive it with as firm aſſurance as any ſuch truth whatever is embraced. The mode of reaſoning is the ſame in both caſes. From the general courſe of the creation, we infer the author and authority of the law of nature: from the

immediate miraculous diſplay of Almighty power, we infer the author and authority of a revealed law.

And now I truſt the queſtion hath been fully anſwered of the connexion between the truth of a miracle wrought and the truth of a doctrine delivered. They are not indeed phyſically connected, but they are linked together by the indiſſoluble chain of clear and accurate reaſoning. The God of truth cannot deceive or miſlead his creatures. His power or permiſſion only can controul that courſe of nature which depends upon his will. This controuling power is manifeſted avowedly in atteſtation of a doctrine which, in its nature doth admit and may receive ſuch atteſtation. As firmly, therefore, as we are aſſured of God's moral attributes, ſo firmly is the truth of this doctrine eſtabliſhed; and from the reality of the miraculous interpoſition is it deduced upon a maxim no

leſs

leſs evident than this, that "*God is not* "*a man that he ſhould lye.*"

It is ſcarcely neceſſary to obſerve, that by thus ſtating the evidence of a revelation, in which we firſt conſider the general nature of its doctrines, and then the extrinſic atteſtations by which it is ſupported, we by no means argue in a circle; from the truth of the doctrine to the truth of the miracles, and again from the truth of theſe to that of the doctrine. Our progreſs is juſt and reaſonable. We firſt conſider whether the doctrine be in its nature ſuch as may poſſibly be derived from the author of all perfection: and when aſſured of this, proceed to poſitive evidence, and fairly enquire what are the direct manifeſtations of its divine origin. Juſt as in all matters of fact. We firſt enquire whether the thing atteſted may poſſibly be true. Should it appear at once inconſiſtent, impoſſible or abſurd, ſhould it

betray

betray any evident marks of falſehood, we immediately reject it. On the other hand, ſhould it ſuſtain this ſcrutiny unimpeached, we then proceed to examine the poſitive atteſtations; and by theſe is our aſſent directed.

But we have lived to hear it aſſerted that by thus reſting the truth of a revelation on the miracles wrought in its ſupport, we in effect overturn the whole ſyſtem of Proteſtantiſm, and contradict all the principles of Reformation. A reformer, it ſeems, might be fairly told, 'you aſſume the character of an Apoſtle, you preach new interpretations of ſcripture; and this is to preach a new doctrine, to promulge a new revelation. Shew us then what you yourſelves contend to be the true credentials of a divine miſſion.'—Whatever anſwer may have been aſcribed to him, a temperate and reaſonable reformer might think it ſufficient to anſwer thus:

—'The

—'The Scriptures affure me, that it is 'my duty to teach and preach with all 'boldnefs what I am convinced, upon 'the cleareft and beft informed judg-'ment, is the true word of God. I 'deliver no new Revelation, but declare 'what I conceive to be the original doc-trines contained in thefe lively oracles. 'I rife up againft the inventions of man 'and the errours of later times. Judge 'ye what I fay: compare it with the 'word delivered to us all. Try both 'my opinion and your own by that 'ftandard, and decide for yourfelves. 'I difclaim all coercive power, all do-'minion over the confciences of other 'men. I am not invefted with the au-'thority of an infpired Prophet to punifh 'the refractory: Do not then demand 'from me the outward figns of fuch 'authority. I pretend not to have re-'ceived an immediate extraordinary di-'vine miffion. Do not then require 'the credentials of fuch a miffion.'——

Such

Such an anſwer, I ſay, might be ſufficient. Nor are we indeed to look for the working of miracles to aſcertain the ſenſe of God's written word. This were to give a revealed Scripture, and at the ſame time to controul or counteract the exerciſe of reaſon in the ſtudy of it. To our natural reaſon is it ſubmitted; and what a ſincere, diligent, unprejudiced enquiry determines to be its genuine ſenſe is, to the enquirer, the revealed will of God, as it is the law by which he is finally to be judged. In the more important points he is effectually ſecured from errour. For here, the characters are ſo plain, that he that runs may read. In matters of greater obſcurity, God requires no more than the utmoſt efforts of an honeſt and a faithful mind.

It muſt be the buſineſs of another diſcourſe to apply this general reaſoning to the particular caſe of our holy Religion, and to examine the poſitive evidence

dence of thoſe miracles recorded in the Goſpel. And when we examine theſe foundations of our faith, let it ever be remembered that the purpoſe is not merely to inform the underſtanding and regulate the judgment. The end of our labour is to enliven the affections and influence the conduct. That while we guard againſt the weakneſs of yielding to "*every wind of doctrine*," while we "*hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering*," we may act and live conformably to the "*hope of our calling*:" that we may receive the reward of thoſe, who in the midſt of "*offences endure unto the end*," with ſteadfaſt faith and uniform obedience.

SERMON III.

Proof of Christianity from Miracles.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

PART II.

ST. JOHN, iii. 2.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

THE propriety of this conclusion I have formerly endeavoured to explain. I examined those reasonings which affect to demonstrate the impossibility of any miraculous interpositions of the Almighty power. I trust it hath appeared that such interpositions are neither impossible

to

to be ſuppoſed, nor incapable of being proved: And that, when duly proved, they may afford the cleareſt and moſt forcible evidence that the perſon by whom they are wrought is really "*a* "*teacher come from God.*"

I AM now to proceed to the particular caſe of the Goſpel-miracles.—And before we examine the extrinſic evidence by which theſe are eſtabliſhed, the reaſonings of the adverſary oblige us to conſider the works themſelves recorded in the New Teſtament: ſo as to be aſſured from their nature and their circumſtances, that they were the works of God himſelf, the effects of his power, and the ſeal of his teſtimony.

IT is declared in theſe ſcriptures, that at a time, and in a place, of general expectation of a perſonage great in his power, and extraordinary in his endowments, a perſon did appear profeſſing to be

be ſent from Heaven, the promiſed Teacher and Saviour of mankind. His worldly ſtate was lowly; but his going forth was in the moſt ſtupendous manifeſtations, both of wiſdom and of might. The whole ſyſtem of natural things appeared ſubject to his controul. The firſt and leaſt of his public works was an inſtantaneous change of water into wine, without any application or ſenſible interpoſition. He proceeded, with a word or with a touch, to heal all manner of diſeaſes, however inveterate, or incurable by human means, effectually, perfectly, and inſtantly. Lepers were at once made clean: The lame, the maimed, and the paralytic, aroſe and walked in full ſtrength and agility: The blind, even from the womb, regained their perfect ſight: He commanded the withered limb to be ſtretched out, and at once it received its original power. The ſpirit of fury and madneſs was at once ſubdued, and reaſon perfectly re-eſtabliſhed.

bliſhed. The woman who had been waſted twelve years by her infirmity, was compleatly healed, when ſhe had but touched his garment. He declared thoſe whole who lay languiſhing at a diſtance from him; and at the time of his declaration they were reſtored: He ſent forth diſciples, who in his name were enabled to perform the like acts of power and benevolence: He commanded the winds, and they were ſtill: He rebuked the waves, and they were ſtayed. At his will a few loaves and fiſhes multiplied under the hands of his attendants, ſo as to feed four or five thouſand perſons to the full, and to leave fragments in abundance much greater than the original proviſion. He raiſed the ruler's daughter to new life, who had expired before his arrival, the widow's ſon who was on the point of interment, and Lazarus who had lain four days in the grave. Theſe ſtupendous

works

works were continued for a length of time; performed in various places, on a vaſt variety of objects, without failure or delay in any one intended effect; generally, in public places and crowded aſſemblies; oftentimes in preſence of bitter enemies, who ſaw, examined, and were compelled to acknowledge them.

A STRANGER to the ſacred records might ſuſpect theſe things to be ſuggeſted by fancy, or artfully exaggerated: yet they are but ſome part of the natural unadorned declarations of our ſcripture. Add to theſe the miracles of knowledge which our Lord diſplayed. He diſcerned the ſpirits and ſecret thoughts of man: foretold the defection of a diſciple ſeemingly the moſt zealous in his attachment, and this diſtinctly and circumſtantially; pointed out the perſon who ſhould betray him; deſcribed his own future ſufferings and death, the treatment his followers were to expect, and the judg-

ment

ment that awaited his murderers; and appealed to his resurrection as the final and decisive proof of his divine mission. And he did rise from the grave at the time foretold; conversed many days with his disciples, ascended visibly into Heaven; poured the holy spirit upon his immediate followers, according to his promise, thus enabling them in a moment to speak a variety of languages they never learned, and to perform in his name such signs and wonders, as he himself had wrought in the course of his ministry. On the bare imposition of their hands were the like gifts and powers communicated to new converts. And thus the word, preached by these men, in the name of Jesus, grew and prevailed, against the prejudices, the passions, and the interests of mankind.

This series of miracles it is on which we rest our cause. Nor are we at all concerned to discuss those cavilling objections

jections we ſometimes hear of oppoſite miracles wrought in different or oppoſite religious ſyſtems. Not one of thoſe whoſe divinity we deny ever aſſumed, ever appealed to any ſuch atteſtation, any thing approaching, any thing that bears the leaſt reſemblance to what hath now been exhibited: a diſpenſation truly great, auguſt, and gracious; where the nature and circumſtances of the works performed, their immediate intention, and their final purpoſe, all conſpire in diſplaying the agency of God. A point which we might reſt upon the bare detail, but that the induſtry and obſtinacy of thoſe who would ſeduce you oblige us to proceed to a more particular examination of the characters of theſe works.

And firſt, it ſhould ſeem, that there were little need to prove that the works now recited were really ſuperiour and repugnant to the courſe of natural things,

or, what is generally called, really miraculous. Yet of this, the disputer tells us, we can never be assured. 'The 'discoveries,' saith he, 'continually 'making in the laws of nature; those 'which probably shall yet be made; the 'progress of human industry, past, pre-'sent, and future; and the different li-'mits which men assign to the series of 'natural possibilities, as they are more 'or less enlightened, all prove that we 'do by no means know nor can ascer-'tain these limits. But a miracle, to be 'really so, must transcend them. Whe-'ther, therefore, there have been mira-'cles or no, it is not possible for a wise 'man to assure himself that any given 'fact whatever is really miraculous.'— This reasoning, frivolous as it may be deemed, hath yet been thought worthy of being adopted, repeated, and enforced. I shall therefore treat it with more attention than perhaps it hath as yet received.

It is allowed then that the gradual progreſs of knowledge hath pointed out the natural ſolution of ſeveral appearances, which to an unenlightened age and people might appear miraculous. A man ſkilled in mechanicks, acquainted with the magnet or the electric fire, verſed in the experiments and proceſſes of the chemical art, might, in a crowd of ſavages, or perhaps in a congregation of ignorant Popiſh bigots, eaſily paſs for ſomething more than human. But a rational witneſs of ſuch works, though a ſtranger to their ſecret proceſs and contrivance, might naturally obſerve, 'Theſe things, indeed, are wonderful: 'they ſurpriſe and confound us; but the 'power operating here is not diſplayed 'without ſome preparation, ſome ma-'nagement, ſome application of natural 'bodies. The effects are produced but 'at ſome particular times, not always 'in the ſame preciſe manner, the ſame 'degree of perfection. Theſe effects are

'of one, or of a few particular kinds 'resembling each other, and confined 'in their extent. But the power of 'God acts without intervention, in-'stantly, consummately, and extensive-'ly; so as to controul nature in its or-'dinary and plainest operations, fami-'liar and obvious to the meanest equally 'with the wisest; and not confined to 'the production of natural effects in an 'unusual and surprising manner.'

Thus, I say, might a reasonable though unlearned observer argue. And accordingly, the accounts of such works, if once transmitted to the more informed part of mankind, soon detect the imposition. Here such works are scarcely unusual; much less unaccountable by natural causes. Not like the works of God; these neither time, nor knowledge, nor repeated scrutiny, hath ever in the least impeached; ever produced effects to emulate them; ever assigned a cause

or ſolution of them, other than an immediate interpoſition of Divine power.

In like manner, in the particular art of healing, induſtry and accident may have produced many wonderful diſcoveries. Diſeaſes may have been cured with unuſual facility and ſpeed. Yet ſtill the operation of natural cauſes remains evident to be traced, however forcible and rapid in its progreſs. Leſs dangerous affections may be ſoon removed by the application of ſome active medicine. But in any caſes more inveterate and alarming, careful preparation becomes neceſſary, a diligent and accurate uſe of means, a patient expectation of ſucceſs. The change wrought in the diſtempered frame is gradual, frequently imperfect; the effect is different in different ſubjects, ſometimes entirely failing, in deſpight of human ſkill and ſagacity. And where hath that medicine been found adapted to the cure of "*all*

"*manner*

"*manner of infirmities?*" Had the eager and interested enquiries of ages produced any such, still it never could assume a preternatural appearance, unless, administered imperceptibly, it were to operate in every case alike, in every case perfectly, in every case instantaneously; which they who are at all acquainted with the animal constitution will acknowledge to be even physically impossible.

Again, means have been discovered to restore those who apparently were dead. But the operations are laborious, gradual, critical, and precarious. Never was it known or heard that a person in this state, on any of the usual applications instantly arose and enjoyed his perfect health. Persons seemingly dead may also have revived without assistance. But no man hath been found so skilful as repeatedly to discover the happy moment of their restoration, before the appearance

pearance of its natural ſigns, ſo that at his touch or his command, they ſhould at once ariſe, and ariſe to perfect life and health. Let him conceal his knowledge of thoſe natural ſigns which are leſs apparent to the vulgar; let him chuſe the moſt favourable moment to pronounce his magiſterial word; the expected effect muſt on ſeveral trials be frequently delayed; human means muſt be employed to accelerate and enforce it; time and patient care alone can perfect the recovery; ſo eminently diſtinguiſhable are the powers of nature, (though we ſuppoſe them greater than experience hath ever warranted) from the "*great power of God.*"

'GIVE me miracles,' ſaith the diſputer, 'which ſhall remain ſo, whatever 'may be diſcovered in nature and its 'powers, univerſally, in all times and 'in all places!'—Behold then, we give him miracles, which, after all the improvements

provements of knowledge, all the critical and even malignant examination of those who are well acquainted with the operations of natural causes, have for more than seventeen hundred years, in all places, and to all persons, the vulgar and the learned alike, approved themselves evidently and illustriously; and declared the power that wrought them, in a language too plain to be mistaken.

Yet, not convinced, at least not silenced, still he urges, 'Do we know 'what discoveries may yet be made? 'What important secrets lie within the 'sphere of natural causes? Can we assign 'the extent and limits of these causes?' By no means! nor is it necessary that we should. For we know, what discoveries *cannot* yet be made; what *cannot* lie within the sphere of natural causes; what events are *not* and *cannot* be within their limits. And this is sufficient to distinguish

diſtinguiſh facts really miraculous from ſuch as may be produced by natural means.

If we be to determine upon reaſonable grounds of probability, we may, from what hath hitherto appeared in the progreſs of human knowledge, pronounce with good aſſurance, that the diſcoveries yet to be made cannot be ſo tranſcendent, in kind or in extent, as to ſink us into a ſtate of very great comparative ignorance. But let the induſtry and ſagacity of man be exerted with ever ſuch aſtoniſhing ſucceſs; ſtill there is nothing more common in every human art, than to point out thoſe particular objects which it never can attain; and this, with a certainty founded on its very nature and principles.

The phyſician, for example, proves from the animal œconomy, that there are maladies abſolutely incurable by nature.

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* He inſtances in the caſe of blindneſs from the womb, where the diſorder ariſes not from caſual obſtruction, but an original defect to be ſupplied only by a creative power. He inſtances in the caſe of a limb dried up and withered, from which the nerves and veſſels are abſolutely cut off, and which cannot be reſtored; no more than the whole frame can be made to live again by any natural power. He pronounces, in like manner, upon the caſe of a woman exhauſted for twelve years by a flux of blood: on that of one bowed down by her infirmity for eighteen years, in which period the muſcular fibres of the loins muſt have become incurably rigid and contracted.—But let us ſuppoſe the reaſonings of theſe men not ſtrictly ſcientific; and that it is but highly improbable that ſuch inveterate diſorders can be remedied by human means. It muſt then be vaſtly more improbable, that any means can be deviſed to diſpel them

* *Vid. Meade's Med. Sacra.*

them in a ſhort time, a day, an hour, a minute. Still vaſtly more improbable again, that the application of ordinary ſubſtances, evidently of no force or experienced efficacy, ſhould at all ſubdue them though tried for years and ages: that they ſhould *at once* ſubdue them, utterly incredible, evidently beyond the bounds of natural poſſibilities. But when without any material application whatſoever, thoſe who labour under them, and not thoſe alone, but wretches afflicted with all the various maladies to which humanity is expoſed, are with a gracious dignity commanded to be whole, and at once are whole; that underſtanding muſt be brutally darkened, and that heart obſtinately hardened, that do not ſee and confeſs a power ſuperiour to nature.

In other inſtances again we can with equal confidence pronounce of ſome facts, that they are not, nor can be within

within the bounds of nature; although we know not every effect which may be included within these bounds. The man possessed with magnificent expectations of future discoveries and improvements in natural knowledge may amuse himself with the supposition, that a Philosopher of some distant age may find means of raising some degree of local agitation in our air or waters. But the first and most evident principles of his science assure him that it would be absurd to suppose that the power of man should ever quiet the tempest and allay the raging waves, in a moment. Whatever be his opinions of the extent of natural powers, he must assuredly pronounce, that there is no natural creative power; that no natural means can ever be discovered of multiplying five loaves and two fishes into a more than competent provision for five thousand persons.—He knows assuredly that no artificial arrangement, no modification of material things, yet to be discovered,

covered, can re-unite the ſpirit with this earthly tabernacle.——Experience hath taught him that deaths and diſeaſes may be ſudden. But he never could ſuſpect, that man ſhould ever inveſtigate the means of inflicting deaths or diſeaſes by a word: for this were to ſuppoſe that an effect might naturally be produced, without an adequate natural cauſe.——He knows that ſome men learn ſtrange languages with peculiar facility. But that a number of men ſhould, in a moment, be enabled to converſe in a variety of languages which they had never learned, perhaps never heard; that on their touch the ſame ſtupendous knowledge ſhould be immediately conveyed to others, and by them again to others in ſucceſſion; theſe are events manifeſtly underivable from any powers of nature. To attempt to prove it, were as ridiculous, as to doubt, or to deny it.

Supposing then the Gospel-miracles to have been fairly related and attested, (a matter to be hereafter distinctly considered) we see the weakness and insufficiency of vague suppositions and sceptical suggestions, against the plain detail of actions not merely unaccountable upon any principles of nature yet discovered, but evidently repugnant and contradictory to the most obvious principles of nature, and evidently discovering a dominion and controul over the course of this world.

And here, by the way, we may observe the advantage with which we argue, by resting our defence upon the whole series of wonderful works recorded in the New Testament with all their circumstances and consequences. I dare not affirm but that one single miracle may be so circumstanced as to afford ample conviction, to an ingenuous and rational enquirer. But a great number and variety of such works continued for a long time, united,

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as it were, into one ſyſtem, and all co-operating to one great purpoſe, muſt be acknowledged infinitely more forcible. Here, the ſeveral particular events explain, ſupport, and enforce each other. If perverſe ingenuity ſhould be able to hang the leaſt ſuſpicion upon one, others are exhibited to efface it utterly. Thus, were it urged, that the force of imagination might have operated on the woman who preſſed through the crowd to touch the garment of our Lord; we produce the like inſtances of his power, where no ſuch force could poſſibly have operated, where there was no previous perſuaſion of his efficacy, no knowledge of him, no application for relief, nay, where the relief was granted at his word to a diſtant perſon. If it be wantonly urged, that clay and ſpittle might have been the vehicles of ſome active medicine fitted to the caſe of blindneſs; extravagant as the ſuggeſtion is, we give it a deciſive anſwer; for we produce caſes

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of blindneſs cured at our Lord's command. If a ſuſpicion be pretended, that the Ruler's daughter whom he raiſed had not really been dead, we have this inſtance of his power confirmed by that of the Widow's Son whom he inſtantly reſtored when on the way to his interment: this again, by the caſe of Lazarus, who had lain in the grave even to a ſtate of putrefaction: and this again, by our Lord's own ſtupendous triumph over death. And if ſome one inſtance of his power ſhould not at once ſtrike us with thoſe characters of greatneſs and goodneſs ſtrongly impreſſed upon the ſyſtem at large, we have the advantage of accounting for it (even though the difficulty were not conquerable by attention and cloſe inſpection) as candour directs us to account for a particular obſcurity in ſome ſublime and admirable writer of a diſtant age; from our own remoteneſs of ſituation, from our unavoidable ignorance of circumſtances and particular

proprieties.

proprieties. And little would be the critic's praiſe, in either caſe, who ſhould diſregard the general tenour of the work before him, and pronounce ſentence on its character, from one apparent, or even real difficulty.

And by this method of ſtating the evidence of Goſpel-miracles we alſo avoid the neceſſity of dwelling particularly upon the objection ſome times ſuggeſted, that works may be wrought by evil ſpirits ſurpaſſing all the works of nature, and conſequently ſuch as muſt be deemed miraculous. The miracles to which we appeal are evidently of that kind, that tendency, and purpoſe, which exclude all ſuſpicion of the agency of ſuch beings. Some of them, it is evident, ſurpaſs their powers. We know in whoſe hands alone are the iſſues of life and death: We know in whom alone is the power of creation. And ſhould it be ſuppoſed that ſome of them

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are not beyond their ſphere of action; the wonders of evil ſpirits, we are certain, muſt be malicious, or at beſt fantaſtical; not the effects of goodneſs and compaſſion. Nor could they labour to ſubvert their own dominion, (as our Lord himſelf deigned to obſerve) and to eſtabliſh a religion of purity and goodneſs. Wherever they may have been, or may hereafter be, permitted to contend againſt the truth; their very works have ever borne, muſt ever bear, ſuch evident marks of inferiority as to diſtinguiſh them from the "*great power of* "*God.*" If the Egyptian Sorcerers wrought by them, they were controulled, confounded, and obliged to confeſs the ſuperiour power of the Almighty. If Simon Magus was by their means enabled to deceive the people of Samaria, he was confronted by a miracle which he confeſſed himſelf unable to perform. If Elymas was their agent, the Apoſtle was enabled to triumph openly and ſolemnly

lemnly over their power. And were it neceſſary to aſcribe the lying wonders of later times to their influence, theſe are too impotent and futile not to be at once diſtinguiſhable from the leaſt of God's works. Nor can we entertain the ſlighteſt apprehenſion, that he will ever give his glory to another, or inveſt the enemy with thoſe illuſtrious characters of his authority and might, which would betray his creatures into inevitable deluſion.

Without dwelling longer upon an objection which ſeems to have no real weight with thoſe who urge it, I now aſſume as evident, that the wonderful works performed by our Lord, and in his name, indicate a power ſuperiour to nature and its operations: ſuperiour, and in their purpoſe repugnant, to that of any evil and malicious agent, how powerful ſoever; and therefore that they manifeſt the immediate extraordinary inter-

position of God. So that no man could have done these works, except "*God*" were "*with him.*" And this is the great character necessary to render these miracles a solid foundation of our faith.

But there are some collateral circumstances and characters of this evidence still to be considered. And first,

The works recited are not only in themselves a sufficient testimony; but were wrought and appealed to formally and expressly, as the testimony of God to the mission of our Lord and his disciples. — Of this, if of any point, we have full, clear, repeated assurances in the New Testament.

We find our Lord solemnly appealing to his works, as "*bearing witness* "*that the father had sent him*;" requiring a belief in him "*for his very works*' "*sake*;"

"*sake*;" pronouncing a dreadful woe upon those people who obstinately resisted the evidence of those "*mighty works*," which must have influenced Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom; pointing out his miracles to the disciples of John, as the principle whence they, and all reasonable witnesses, were to determine on his character; declaring to the Jews, "*If I do not the* "*works of my Father, believe me not*;" but if I do, "*though ye believe not me*," though you have no regard to my person or my doctrine, yet, "*believe the* "*works; that ye may know and believe* "*that the father is in me, and I in* "*him*;" and representing the rejection of this evidence as their great guilt, "*If* "*I had not done among them the works,* "*which none other man did, they had not* "*had sin; but now, they have both seen, and* "*hated both me and my father*."——In like manner we are assured, "*the Lord* "*gave testimony*" to the Apostles, by "*granting signs and wonders to be done*

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"*by their hands:*" that he "*bare them* "*witness both with signs and wonders,* "*and diverse miracles and gifts of the* "*Holy Ghost.*"

In vain then is it suggested that, far from resting the truth of his doctrine on the evidence of his works, our Lord had preached his doctrine and collected his disciples, before he wrought any miracle; an assertion not merely groundless, but repugnant to the tenour of the evangelists. Before his public appearance, his power must have been manifested to those around him; else, at the marriage of Cana, his mother could not have addressed herself to him, to supply the present want of her kinsfolk. He was pointed out to the Baptist by a miraculous declaration of his person and authority. They who were first to receive him, received him upon the evidence of this declaration, and were instantly witnesses of his own miraculous power or knowledge;

ledge: and we are assured that their belief in him was confirmed by the miracle of Cana. He called those who by their situation had been witnesses of his works. They continued witnesses of them before he made a solemn appointment of the Twelve; still they remained with him a considerable time before he sent them forth to preach and to perform miracles in his name, for the confirmation of their own faith as well as that of others. The doctrine and the testimony were thus inseparably united, and conveyed together.

They who yielded to the force of this testimony, who in despight of former prejudices and opinions believed in him for his "*very works' sake*," were commended and rewarded. A firm reliance on his power as the power of God, a firm persuasion of his authority and mission, grounded on the testimony of his former works, are sometimes said to be

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the cauſe of his miraculous aſſiſtance to the perſons thus affected. That faith which they entertained he ſometimes called upon them to profeſs, for the edification of thoſe around him. But theſe and ſuch like inſtances, in which it evidently appears that the faith approved or required was founded on the evidence of his miracles, are vainly urged to ſhew that faith, and profeſſion of his doctrine, were ever demanded previous to any manifeſtation of his miraculous power; when we find this power manifeſted in the relief of various perſons who made no ſuch profeſſion; who were ſtrangers to his doctrine and character, who had no reliance on his power; nor were at all acquainted with his miracles.

But it is to be obſerved, in the next place, that in this ſtupendous diſpenſation, as in all thoſe of God's moral government, man was ſtill left to his reaſon and his freedom. The ingenuous,

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the upright, and the humble, had every assurance of the truth that ingenuousness, integrity, and humility could require; but the evidence was not obtruded on those who were prepared to reject it; nor was every perverse demand, every unreasonable suggestion of pride, malice, and obstinacy, gratified at once. Thus, our Lord's kinsfolk despised his doctrine, and were unaffected by such evidence of his power as they had already received. In Nazareth, therefore, we are told he "*did not many* "*mighty works*;" or, as St. Mark expresses it, "*he could do no mighty works*, "*because of their unbelief*:" he did not, and could not consistently with the views of Divine wisdom, persist in enforcing the miraculous attestations of his mission on those who received them with scorn and aversion. Thus, when the nobleman besought our Lord to heal his son, he answered, "*Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*" Not that

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he expected to be received without any testimony of works at all; or that he condemned the construing his acts of benevolence into attestations of his mission: but that he condemned the not accepting, as a sufficient attestation, those instances of his power which he had already displayed, and which had occasioned the present application for his assistance. He reproved that averseness to a reasonable conviction which presumptuously waited for the most astonishing and irresistible impressions upon the senses. Yet, far from previously demanding an implicit faith, he vouchsafed, in the present case, to the doubting and the "*slow of heart to believe*," a manifestation of his power, greater far than had been desired or conceived. Thus again, when the Pharisees had absurdly and maliciously ascribed his miracles to the power of the Devil, and affected to require other demonstrations of the truth, some immediate miraculous declaration

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from Heaven in his favour; he pronounces that their unreasonable demand should not be gratified in the manner they had presumed to prescribe. Yet still that the most obstinate of their nation should finally be left without excuse, by one last stupendous evidence, the "*sign of the prophet Jonah.*" He, when he had been three days in the whale's belly, approved himself a real prophet to the Ninevites, by his miraculous preservation: so the "*Son of Man*" was to be approved by continuing three days only under the dominion of the grave.

Lastly, we are to observe, that all this display of power was absolutely unallayed by the least mixture of ostentation or vain-glory. It was not confounding or overpowering; it was not introduced with magnificent promises of his own, or of those connected with him, nor attended with pompous exultation, but

but was meek, humble, and temperate. When the wonders wrought had made ſuch an impreſſion upon the multitude as threatened to diſturb the peace of ſociety, the great agent retired from the praiſe of men. When they had excited the malice of his enemies, he avoided, inſtead of miraculouſly ſubduing their animoſity. He repeatedly commanded thoſe whom he relieved in private that they "*ſhould tell no man*;" where an immediate declaration of the miracle might have provoked his enemies, or tranſported his adherents into ſuch a conduct as threatened to interrupt the ordinary courſe of his miniſtry. And the very manner of performing ſome of his miraculous cures ſeems calculated to prevent any violent conſequences from the temper and diſpoſition of thoſe around him.

And now to collect all that hath been offered into one point. The ſeries of

miracles

miracles recorded in the New Teſtament bear the plaineſt marks of Divine power, goodneſs, and wiſdom. They were wrought with every circumſtance of truth and credibility, and with the moſt awful and amiable conjunction of dignity and humility, condeſcenſion and authority. If it be ſtill doubted whether ſuch a courſe of works be a ſufficient atteſtation of our Lord's character and miſſion, or whether his expreſs and repeated appeal to them was juſt and reaſonable; at leaſt it muſt be acknowledged that God CAN reveal his will to man: and that he CAN impreſs the marks of his authority upon this revelation. Let man, then, exalt his thoughts and ſtretch every faculty within him to the utmoſt; and let him ſay how the Divine agency could be manifeſted clearly and forcibly, yet ſo as not to deſtroy man's liberty, nor confound his faculties. We aſſert, (and we rely upon the experiment for the truth of our aſſertion) that

that the heart of man cannot conceive a manifeſtation of the Divine agency more clear, more forcible, more ſuited to the nature both of God and man, than that courſe of miracles to which we appeal. If it then be doubtful, whether theſe were really the works of God, the ſame doubt, at leaſt, muſt be entertained in any other conceivable caſe. So that the impious conſequences are theſe: God cannot manifeſt his immediate agency. He cannot bear teſtimony to any meſſenger of his will. He hath ſuffered his ſacred name to be uſurped; ſo as to involve his creatures in an errour involuntary, a temptation unavoidable; and this, in a matter of the utmoſt moment to their happineſs and the glory of his holy name.

And thus the pride of ſcepticiſm, after all its deviations and perplexed windings from the path of plain reaſon, ſinks at laſt into the gloom of abſurdity and impiety.

impiety. Odious in its progreſs, yet ſometimes neceſſary to be traced diſtinctly. The ſubject before us is, indeed, of ſuch importance as warrants, nay demands the cloſeſt and minuteſt inſpection on our part. Numberleſs are the difficulties with which the gainſayer hath attempted to perplex it. I have endeavoured to aſſiſt your reflections, and to lead you to that juſt view of it, which, by God's gracious aſſiſtance, ſhall guard you againſt his ſubtilty. I ſhall proceed yet further, on ſome future occaſion, to lay before you a ſummary of that extrinſic evidence, by which we are aſſured that theſe wonderful works were really wrought, as they have been now ſtated and ſuppoſed. *

* *The diſcourſe here promiſed does not appear among Dr. Leland's papers.*

SERMON IV.

The Humiliation of our Saviour no reasonable Objection to his Divine Mission.

ST. MATTHEW, c. xiii. part of v. 54, and 55.

They were astonished; and said, whence hath this man this wisdom: and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's Son?

FROM the moment that the great Saviour of the world first entered on the work of his ministry, the attestations of his divine mission were apparently irresistible. His life was holy and benevolent, his wisdom and his works stu-

pendous: But his ſtate of life was lowly, and his general appearance utterly repugnant to their groſs conceptions who look for worldly eminence and greatneſs, in every extraordinary character.

THE Prophets were in the hands of his countrymen. In them they might read that the Meſſiah was to be "*without form or comelineſs; deſpiſed and rejected of men; a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief.*" But in them they alſo read, that "*the government ſholud be upon his ſhoulder; that his name ſhould be called, wonderful; counſellor; the mighty God; the everlaſting father; the prince of peace:*" and that "*of the encreaſe of his government there ſhould be no end, upon the throne of David; and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to eſtabliſh it, with judgment, and with juſtice, from henceforth even for ever.*" Poſſeſſed with thoſe ideas of carnal pomp, erroneouſly deduced from

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ſuch deſcriptions, they were aſhamed of "*the carpenter's ſon.*" His kinsfolk and acquaintance were indifferent to his wiſdom, and hardened againſt his miracles, for they had been witneſſes of the meanneſs of his birth. His reputed parents lived in poverty, and the place of his nativity had even become a proverb and bye-word of contempt.

But it is not theſe ignorant Galileans only, who have been thus "*ſlow of* "*heart to believe all that the prophets have* "*ſpoken*;" to compare their declarations with the circumſtances of our Lord's appearance, and to draw the true concluſion from that ſingular union of abaſement and exaltation which formed his character. The ſame prejudice hath been always entertained; at leaſt the ſame objection to his appearance hath been ever urged, from the earlieſt oppoſition to the Goſpel, down to our own times. The pride of the gainſayer hath con-

ſpired with his corruption, and taught him to reject the Saviour who came diveſted of all worldly dignity; who lived in poverty and ſorrow, and died in ignominious torture.

WERE it ſufficient to enlarge on the unreaſonableneſs of ſuch prejudices, it is obvious to obſerve that theſe notions of worldly magnificence are really mean and ſordid; and that our Lord's appearance had that real and intrinſic greatneſs, which by infinite degrees tranſcends all that was ever known or heard, all that can be imagined, of human power and glory. If, at his birth, this prince of peace was depoſited in a manger, yet his birth was proclaimed by multitudes of the heavenly hoſt: and the eaſtern ſages were conducted by his ſtar, to adore the infant of this humble habitation. If he was not attended by obſequious crowds, and a gorgeous train, yet angels adminiſtered to him.

If

If the voice of homage was not loud in proclaiming his worldly greatneſs, a voice from heaven declared him the beloved Son of God. He did not command armies and kingdoms, but he commanded the winds and the waves: Nature was ſubject to him: his word controuled and changed its courſe; and, while he had not "*where to lay his head*," he yet gave health, and ſtrength and life.

But it ſeems of more importance to conſider the wiſe and gracious purpoſes which were anſwered by this ſtate of humiliation in which our Lord appeared. The myſterious ſacrifice of the Croſs, the great final work of our Redemption is a matter of diſtinct conſideration. Our preſent ſubject is the life of our bleſſed Saviour: and we may trace the marks of divine grace and wiſdom in the circumſtances of it, if we conſider him,

First,

FIRST, as as a teacher of righteouſneſs, ſent from God.

SECONDLY, as our perfect pattern of holineſs.

I. As a teacher, and a divine teacher, the authority of his doctrine, as well as the power of his miracles, was juſtified by his humiliation againſt all the ſuggeſtions of prejudice and malice. If "*never man ſpeak like this man*," and if his birth and life were of the lowlieſt kind; the queſtion of his countrymen, "*whence* "*hath*" he "*this wiſdom?*" admitted but of one, and this an obvious anſwer. 'It is wonderful, and irreſiſtible, 'gracious and comfortable, light to the 'underſtanding, life and vital warmth 'to the heart: his brethren have not 'taught it to him; they "*are all with* "*us*:" we know their courſe of life, 'their low and uninſtructed courſe of 'labour and obſcurity. To the ſchools of

'heathen

'heathen knowledge he hath been an ut-
'ter ſtranger: From the ſynagogue he
'could not have derived this wiſdom,
'when at the age of twelve years, he con-
'founded the old and reverend teachers
'of our nation. His wiſdom therefore,
'evidently not of man, muſt be from
'God: and as "*no man can do the*
"*works*" that he doth, ſo no man can
'utter the doctrines which he teacheth
'except God be with him.'

And, as it was thus eaſy to trace the origin of the doctrine, from the condition of the teacher; in the ſame way might they have reaſoned on the end and deſign of it. 'It cannot be to ſerve
'any ſelfiſh purpoſe, any ſcheme of
'worldly policy; for, whence could ſuch
'ſchemes be ſuggeſted to its authour?
'they ſuit not ſuch ſtations, nor riſe to
'diſturb ſuch minds as his. We find
'him far removed from pomp and ſplen-
'dour; renouncing the allurements, and

'even

'even ſeparated from the ordinary en-
'joyments of this world. It cannot be
'intended to entice his followers by the
'hopes of temporal advantage; for it is
'a doctrine the moſt unfriendly to all
'carnal gratifications: and it hath a
'teacher, who himſelf bears the hea-
'vieſt part in pain and poverty, in af-
'fliction and perſecution: who invites
'his followers to drink of the ſame bit-
'ter cup; and is inceſſantly forewarning
'them of the trials they are to endure,
'the ſelf-denial they are to practiſe,
'the ſcorn and contradiction, the cru-
'elties and perſecutions they are to en-
'counter, in his ſervice.'

THUS, I ſay, muſt reaſon have natu-
rally dictated to thoſe, who ſaw the
courſe of life, in which our Lord diſ-
played his power and wiſdom. And let
him who "*darkeneth counſel by words
"without knowledge*," ſay, what condi-
tion had been more ſuited to this teacher,

or

or what other worldly character could have displayed his divine mission, with such brightness of evidence as to have at once dispelled all cavil and objection.

Had the authour of our faith assumed the garb of worldly wisdom, and appeared in that scene where worldly wisdom was revered, what a field must the gainsayer have then found for displaying his penetration and sagacity? How often must we have heard of the power of human reason when cultivated with patience, diligence, and zeal? of the wonderful effects of such a studious course, and the weakness of resolving such effects into any superiour agency? of the abilities and address of an ambitious sophist in abusing the ignorance and credulity of the vulgar, in forming his party, establishing his influence, and extending his reputation? Or had he been invested with greatness and majesty;

jesty; then should we have been told of the obsequiousness and flattery naturally attendant on such a station, of the interested views of his adherents, implicitly assenting to his dictates, and acknowledging his pretensions, without daring to bring them to a strict and impartial trial. We had been told, and not without reason, that such a station might be well calculated for influencing the external deportment, but not for regulating the heart and its affections. Or we might perhaps have been reminded of all those princes and lawgivers who falsely pretended to an intercourse with heaven, in order to give weight and authority to their dictates. The policy would have been commended: but the deluded multitude treated with pity and contempt.

And as the lowliness of condition which our Lord assumed, thus served as an attestation of the truth and divinity of

of his doctrine, ſo was it admirably calculated for enforcing every precept of the Goſpel in the moſt extenſive and effectual manner.

The philoſopher addreſſed his precepts to the ſtudious and refined; perhaps with caution and reſerve; perhaps affectedly obſcured. The prince or legiſlator iſſues out his mandates, and demands immediate obedience. Not ſo the revealer of God's hidden counſels. His preaching was addreſſed not only to men of deep reſearch, but to the lowly, the ignorant, and the poor in ſpirit: not reduced to a formal ſyſtem, magiſterially delivered, and left to enlarged abilities and accute penetration, to apprehend, to digeſt, and to apply; but explained and enforced in every way, which tended to enlighten their underſtandings, and conciliate their affections. He choſe that ſtate of life which gave him the freeſt and moſt general acceſs to every order

of

of mankind, the freeſt and moſt frequent occaſions of operating on their different tempers and diſpoſitions. He converſed with every rank and condition, in their chambers and their public places; he mixed with their occupations, their ſocial enjoyments, and their devotions. Every place which he viſited, and every object which he viewed, was made the occaſion of introducing, or the means of illuſtrating his doctrine. He was "*found of them that ſought him not*;" for wherever they were aſſembled, there he courted their attention. He was witneſs of their wants and infirmities; and to theſe his healing wiſdom was adapted: ſometimes conveyed directly, with an awful authority; ſometimes inſinuated by alluſion, parable and ſimilitude. As he had no appearance of worldly dignity to command reſpect and reſerve, the paſſions of his hearers broke forth freely, and gave him conſtant opportunities of accommodating his inſtructions to their

ſeveral

ſeveral characters. When provoked by obſtinacy and ſpiritual pride, he was ſevere in his reproof; when received with ingenuous attention, he was tender and affectionate in his exhortations. He alarmed their fears, he awakened their hopes, he corrected their prejudices, he mortified their preſumption, and comforted their humility: thus ſuiting his life and doctrine to all their different occaſions and neceſſities, and employing every means of edification, every mode of correction and inſtruction, in that familiar intercourſe, from which worldly grandeur is entirely excluded; to which the faſtidious profeſſor of human wiſdom ſeldom condeſcended, but which is the natural and neceſſary reſult of an humble and undignified condition.

And the evidence of that authority, by which he ſpake, derived additional force from the circumſtances of his life. His works were freely, publickly and repeatedly

peatedly performed; examined without reſerve, without favourable prejudice, without deference to worldly power or greatneſs: ſeen, heard, and handled in the intercourſe of common life, diſtinctly, deliberately; by friends and adverſaries, by the obſtinate and ingenuous. When we are told a Roman emperour pretended to work a miracle, his greatneſs, we know, muſt have over-awed all ſcrupulous enquiry. He had his flatterers, his partizans, and accomplices in the fraud, intereſted to ſupport it, and aſhamed, when no longer afraid, to confeſs the artifice. Every thing appears at once ſuſpicious, from his ſtation, from his intereſts, from his political purpoſes, from his means and opportunities of deception. What a cloud of ſuſpicions are here, ariſing from the exalted rank, power, and policy of the agent! Not one of which can in the leaſt dim the luſtre of the "*mighty works*" wrought by "*the carpenter's ſon.*"

II. Let

II. Let us, in the ſecond place, conſider our Bleſſed Saviour as the perfect pattern of righteouſneſs. And here again we ſhall readily diſcern the wiſe and gracious purpoſes which were anſwered by that particular ſtate of life which he aſſumed.

The great ones of this world move in a ſphere ſo exalted, that they are rather objects of wonder than imitation. Our judgments of their actions are oftentimes imperfect and erroneous, for we cannot examine them accurately; and if we could, they are of that nature which few of all the race of mankind can hope to emulate. The magnanimity of a conquerour, the vigilance of a monarch, the public-ſpirit of a law-giver, the condeſcenſion of dignity, the humane and moderate exerciſe of authority; theſe, and ſuch like, are the virtues of a very few. The opportunities of exerciſing them do not conſtantly occur,

occur, and those of imitating them, are still rarer. But piety, loving-kindness, gentleness, meekness, temperance, patience, long-suffering, forgiveness of injuries, and a chearful enduring of shame and suffering for righteousness-sake; these are the virtues of every station, of all persons and of all times: some of them the most grievous to our mortal nature, and such as require the utmost encouragement and support to counteract the disorders of humanity.

And the humble condition of our Lord afforded constant opportunities of displaying these virtues, and of recommending them by his perfect example: that we might "*run with patience the race* "*that is set before us; looking unto* "*Jesus.*"

In the worship of his Heavenly Father, he was diligent and fervent: "*daily in the temple*:" a zealous assertor of the reverence due to the service and the

the houſe of God. He was placed in a ſtate of ſubordination; and he diſplayed a chearful ſubmiſſion to the ordinances of civil ſociety. His intercourſe was free and public, ſo that the wants and miſeries of thoſe around him were perpetually in view. And with theſe, he was deeply and tenderly affected: fervent in the exerciſe of boundleſs love, and unwearied in ſeeking occaſions of adminiſtring both to the ſoul and body. In him we find no affectation of a rigorous ſecluſion from the world, no inſtance of ſuch fantaſtical ſeverities as have ſometimes aſtoniſhed the ignorant and ſuperſtitious, and with them obtained the name of ſanctity: but a conſummate pattern of that life which nature, reaſon, and religion all point out to us, a life of ſocial connexion, a life of active duty, a life of goodneſs and benevolence; with that inward purity and ſelf-government, that amiable compoſure of the temper and affections, of which we diſ-

cover not the leaſt trace in many of the great and glaring characters of the heathen world. Nor in his affliction do we find him proudly boaſting of any independence, or ſelf-ſufficiency; any indifferece to the evils of humanity. His meekneſs and reſignation were, on the contrary, attended with the moſt exquiſite tenderneſs and ſenſibility. He was deeply impreſſed with the ſorrows of thoſe around him; he wept at the obſtinacy of his enemies; and felt the full weight of his own ſufferings.

As theſe virtues were diſplayed in a ſtate of poverty, he hath taught us the real inſignificance of all worldly diſtinctions, and ſhewn us an example of humility and contentment. As he was expoſed to injuries and ſcorn, to reproach and perſecution; he became a perfect pattern of patience, meekneſs and forgiveneſs, "*who, when he was reviled,* "*reviled not again; when he ſuffered,*

"*threatened*

" *threatened not*;" when " *he gave his* " *back to the ſmiters and his cheek to them* " *that plucked off the hair*," yet " *opened* " *not his mouth*:" whoſe rebuke to his own diſciple who betrayed him was no more than, " *friend, betrayeſt thou the ſon* " *of man with a kiſs*;" and who, in his expiring moments prayed for thoſe murderers that inſulted over his miſery and ſhame.

So that the life of our bleſſed Lord rendered his example not only the moſt illuſtrious, but of the moſt general uſe and edification; the moſt effectual comfort to his followers, in all the bitterest trials to be encountered in their preſent ſtate of mortality. If they be diſtreſſed and lowly, he " *had not where to lay his* " *head*:" if reviled and perſecuted, let them " *behold and ſee if there was any* " *ſorrow like unto his ſorrow*;" if great and exalted, let them learn humility of their Maſter and Saviour, who " *emptied*

himself" of the glory he enjoyed before all worlds; and thus, "*took upon him the* "*form of a servant.*"

Upon the whole then, our blessed Lord appeared in that particular state of humanity, which of all others was best fitted to the purposes of his manifestation in the flesh. And in this state, the mind superiour to the vulgar admiration of worldly pomp, can readily discover the real and intrinsic dignity of consummate goodness and benevolence, of meekness, purity, and innocence unspotted, of zealous affection and loving-kindness unparalleled, supporting the contention against pride and blindness, malice and ingratitude, insolence and slander, persecution and torture: an object which even Gentile wisdom hath pronounced to be the greatest and most ennobled that human nature can exhibit.

THUS may we discern, in this as well as other circumstances of the divine dispensations, the weakness and vanity of the disputer of this world, and the wisdom and power of that God, who is "*great in counsel, and mighty in work:*" who can produce strength out of weakness, and accomplish his all-gracious purposes by means apparently the most disproportioned.

How must the powers of darkness have triumphed in all those circumstances of humiliation, which have proved a perpetual scandal to the enemies of the Cross! Messiah the prince, whose coming was proclaimed by the prophets in such terms of magnificence, appears at the fulness of time. But, behold! the "*anointed*," who was to "*proclaim liberty to the captives*," the "*glory of the Lord*," the mighty one who was to "*travel in the greatness of his strength, to tread down the people, and bring their*

"*strength*

"*ſtrength unto the earth,*" appears in the lowlieſt ſtate of human weakneſs; and the infant of humble parentage is ſheltered in a manger! He "*groweth up, as* "*a tender plant, and as a root out of a* "*dry ground.*" He is attended by a few villagers and fiſhermen deſpiſed like their maſter. The great and reverend of his nation inſult and deride him: even his kinſmen turn "*their faces from him,*" and "*eſteem him not.*" "*He is taken* "*from priſon and from judgment;*" and "*Who ſhall declare his generation? for he* "*is cut off out of the land of the liv-* "*ing.*"

Such is the progreſs of the great work of our redemption, ſo offenſive to carnal pride. "*But my thoughts are not your* "*thoughts, neither are my ways your* "*ways, ſaith the Lord.*" In the oppreſſed and the afflicted, was the power of the Almighty manifeſted. Heaven and earth bore witneſs to the divinity of the infant

infant thus meanly entertained. His going forth was in that ſtrength which alone can command and controul all nature. If the hope of Iſrael was ſeized as a malefactor and nailed to the croſs, yet there did he bruiſe the head of the ſerpent: if he "*made his grave with the* "*wicked*," even here did he triumph over death, and "*lead captivity captive*." If he was rejected of his nation, this rejection became the means of extending his ſpiritual dominion into all lands; and his word unto the ends of the world. His followers, poor and deſpiſed as they were, yet ſilenced the Jewiſh doctors, and confounded the wiſdom of the Greeks. Their meanneſs and poverty ſerved to diſſipate thoſe ſuſpicions which might have proved moſt injurious to their miniſtry; and to place their ingenuouſneſs and ſincerity in the faireſt and moſt unexceptionable point of view. In their weakneſs was the power of God diſplayed; and their fooliſhneſs directed

mankind

mankind to the true ſource of that wiſdom which they delivered. And if "*all* "*they who were incenſed againſt them*," were "*aſhamed and confounded*;" if they became "*as nothing*," let every tongue confeſs that the humble inſtruments of ſuch a victory fought in the might of him to whom *the* nations are as "*a* "*drop in the bucket*; *and are counted as* "*the ſmall duſt of the balance*:" who can ſay to the meaneſt agent of his gracious diſpenſations, "*fear not, thou* "*worm, I will help thee. Thou ſhalt fan* "*them, and the wind ſhall carry them* "*away: and the whirlwind ſhall ſcatter* "*them.—That they may ſee, and know,* "*and conſider, and underſtand together,* "*that the hand of the Lord hath done* "*this*."

And now, what remains, but that we acknowledge, and adore, the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, in all the ways of his providence; that with hearts of unfeigned

feigned gratitude and humility we embrace the terms of our ſalvation, inſtead of preſumptuouſly queſtioning the means by which it was effected: that we make the only return in our power to the exceeding great love of our maſter and only Saviour thus living, and thus dying for us, that of love and obedience?

And let it ever be remembered that God will enter into judgment with us for the perveſe abuſe of our reaſoning faculties, as well as for the depravity of our actions: and that if we be ingenious at inventing cavils, and oppoſing vain reaſonings to the plaineſt evidence which he hath given us of his power and goodneſs, ſuch monſtrous miſapplication of our talents ſhall by no means paſs unpuniſhed. The kinsfolk and countrymen of our Lord, who deſpiſed the lowlineſs of their Heavenly Teacher, were abandoned to their blindneſs and prejudices. He turned away to thoſe who were more

capable

capable of being instructed by his doctrines, and more worthy of being convinced by his miracles.—And "*how shall* "*we escape if we neglect so great Salvation.*"

LET us, therefore, earnestly implore the Gracious assisting Spirit of the Lord, to enlighten our understandings, and purify our hearts, that we may know and see what amazing instances of mercy and loving-kindness God hath displayed to us his wretched and unworthy creatures; and that we may share in that blessedness which the captain of our Salvation hath pronounced on those "*who shall not be offended*" in him.

SERMON V.

On the Excellence of Christian Morality.

MATTHEW, chap. v. verse 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

IT is of high and intimate concernment to all who name the name of Christ, that they rightly conceive, and frequently revolve, the true nature of his doctrine, the purity and perfection of that law by which we shall be judged, and the full extent of that duty by which, through God's gracious favour, we shall be accepted. These are, indeed, clearly and explicitly declared in the Gospel. But the declarations of the

Gospel

Gospel are too frequently viewed through the medium of our passions and corruptions; which cast a false colouring over the whole system, or conceal the particulars least flattering to our corrupted nature, and confine our attention to such as, from a partial and distorted view, we conceive to be more indulgent to our offences.

When men transgress openly and directly against the clearest dictates of reason and religion, their consciences are too clamorous, and the violated law too plain for any dangerous security. But if we imagine ourselves the followers of Christ Jesus, when we have not followed him in sincerity and truth; if we aspire to the benefits of his covenant, when we have not performed the conditions of his covenant; if we look to be heirs of his promise, though we be not children of the promise; if we form a new religion for ourselves, and call it the religion

ligion of the Gospel; vainly endeavouring to bring down the perfect and exalted law of Christ, to the level of our own debased, effeminated, and corrupted hearts; then indeed is our delusion truly dangerous.

The declaration of the text, we shall find to be immediately pointed against such delusion: and, to guard us against all dangerous self-deceit, requires only to be distinctly conceived, and duly weighed. It shall, therefore, be my present purpose to consider what is here meant by "*the Law and the Prophets*;" and what we are to understand by our Lord's coming "*not to destroy, but to* "*fulfil*" them. And if I should detain you for some time, in enquiring into the import of these expressions, I have the better reason to expect your serious and patient attention, as the matter to be considered will appear to be of real moment; not a curious speculation, but directly

directly applicable to our hearts and consciences, and deeply and essentially interesting to every soul of man.

In the first place then, by "*the Law*" we generally understand the whole collection of precepts contained in the books of Moses, whether they prescribe the duties to be observed towards God and man, the administration of civil government, or the rights and ceremonials of public worship; and by "*the Prophets*," all those writings of inspired men, which either enforced and explained the law of Moses, or foretold those events in which God's people were concerned, and particularly the coming of their Messias, and the state and circumstances of that kingdom he was to establish.

But by "*the Law and the Prophets*," we are also taught to understand more particularly, that summary of moral precepts delivered by the ministry of Moses,

and

and illuſtrated and recommended by other prophetic writers. In this ſenſe the precept of doing unto others, as we would they ſhould do unto us, is ſaid to be "*the Law and the Prophets.*" In this ſenſe, we are told that on theſe two great precepts, of the love of God, and of our neighbour, "*hang all the Law and* "*the Prophets.*" And in this ſenſe it is obſerved, that "*the Law and the Pro-* "*phets were until John:*" that is, until the time of preaching Chriſt's kingdom, the Jews were left to the direction of their own moral law, as their rule of conduct, and that by which they ſhould be judged.

And that in the Scripture now before us, the ſame phraſe is thus to be underſtood, will appear, poſſibly from the expreſſions, but certainly from its connection both with the preceding, and the following parts of our Lord's divine diſcourſe upon the Mount.

It

It was the immediate purpose of this discourse to correct the carnal errours of his followers, and to mortify those expectations, which the covetous, the ambitious, the proud, the sensual, and malignant, entertained of his kingdom. They seem to have expected, that the new dispensation should free them from all restraints, and provide for the full gratification of all their several passions. But they are assured, in the first place, that the blessings of Christ's kingdom are reserved for the moderate, the mortified, the penitent, the meek, the just, the merciful, the pure, the peaceable, and the patient: that such alone were duly fitted to receive his doctrine, and obtain his promises: that his followers were to be eminently distinguished by these virtues, and to teach them, not by precept only, but example. Then follows the declaration of the text: "*Think not that* "*I am come to destroy the Law and the* "*Prophets*;"

"*Prophets*;" that my dispensation is to be at all friendly to licentious and corrupt desires, that I am to destroy or weaken the obligation of the moral law, or to teach or countenance any lax system of duty. No! for (as it is immediately added) what I call the Law and the Prophets, is of eternal and invariable obligation. "*For, verily I say* "*unto you*," I earnestly enforce it, as a truth of greatest moment, "*'till Heaven* "*and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall* "*in no wise pass from the Law, 'till all* "*be fulfilled*;" or, until the end of all things be come. If then the Law and the Prophets are to continue in full validity, even to the consummation of all things; and if, (as our Lord further declares) "*whosoever shall break one of their least* "*commandments, and shall teach men so*" to do, "*he shall be called the least in the* "*kingdom of Heaven*:" that is, (for so the phrase is interpreted) he shall not at all be, or be accounted, a subject of

this kingdom; it evidently follows, that by the Law and the Prophets we are to understand those precepts of holiness and righteousness contained in the old Scriptures, or what is generally called the Moral Law.

The same interpretation, I have said may also be deduced from the expressions of the text. "*I am not come to destroy* "*but to fulfil*," saith our Lord. The original word signifies to fill up, to enlarge, compleat, and perfect. Here then we are assured, that our Lord's purpose, was not indeed to weaken any of the obligations to moral duties, but to enforce, extend, and establish them on more exalted principles. And, in the progress of his discourse, he illustrates this position of fulfilling and perfecting the moral law, by several instances; worthy our attention, not merely as they confirm the exposition of the text, but

but as they mark the transcendent excellence of christian morality.

In the first place, then, when our Lord had assured his followers, that to be accounted worthy of his kingdom, their righteousness, that is, their whole course of moral conduct, must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the most learned interpreters, and strict observers of the law of Moses, he proceeds thus, "*ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill.*" They were to abstain from the outward act, under the penalty of a severe civil punishment: and were taught to consider the prohibition in a political view, as calculated for the interest of civil society: in like manner as the morality of the heathen world had for its end and purpose, the making men good and useful citizens. But the design of our Lord's dispensation was to form men's tempers, and regulate their affections, so as

to fit and prepare them for their final deſtination. He therefore teaches, not that the act of blood only ſhould be condemned; but that whoſoever harboured ſecret malice, whoſoever ſhould betray it by expreſſions of averſion or contempt, whoſoever ſhould ſuffer it to break out into virulent reproach and reviling, ſhould all, in proportion to their ſeveral degrees of guilt, be obnoxious to the ſeverity of divine juſtice; and of conſequence, that they were to controul the inward emotions of their hearts, and carefully to cultivate the principles of meekneſs, gentleneſs, and loving-kindneſs, patience and forgiveneſs.

In the next place they had been taught to abſtain from the actual commiſſion of impurity. But our Lord's doctrine was, that the conſent and diſpoſition of the heart were conſidered by him who knoweth and trieth the heart: that the in-

dulgence of impure desires is equally offensive in his sight, (as being really what constitutes the sin) and, at least, equally criminal with the outward act: that of consequence we are not only to guard our external conduct, but to subdue our irregular affections, to tear up every root of bitterness, and cast away every occasion of offence, however dear to our corrupted nature.

Not to insist on the superiour excellence of his doctrine relative to divorce; his restraint of those indulgences vouchsafed to the Jews by reason of the hardness of their hearts; and of the licentious interpretations of their doctors: not to dwell on that reverent simplicity of conversation, that total abstinence from every direct or indirect violation of God's name, which he strictly enjoins; I shall remind you but of one instance more, in which our Lord displays the superiority of his doctrine; I mean with

respect

respect to our conduct when we have been injured, and provoked.

"*Ye have heard that it hath been said,* "*an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.*" —The law of retaliation had been in some cases indulged to the Jews, and unwarrantably extended by their teachers. "*But I say unto you, that ye re-* "*sist not evil,*" or the evil man. Or, to render the original expression in its full force, that you do not return or revenge any injurious conduct, by a like injurious conduct, on your part. The peaceable and perfect law of Christ strictly prohibits all private revenge, all litigious, and even all rigorous demands of satisfaction and compensation, where the injury is at all endurable. It commands us to be patient and placable, though we should even provoke a repetition of injuries: to soften our adversary by kindness; and to overcome evil with good. Yet this is not the whole of

our

our duty. It had been ſaid, at leaſt by the interpreters of the Moſaic Law, "*thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, and hate* "*thine enemy.*" But far from confining that charity which is the peculiar character of Chriſt's followers, he teacheth, that it is not to be extinguiſhed even by the moſt outrageous enmity: that our adverſaries, however unjuſt and virulent, are our Chriſtian brethren; that we ſhould preſerve the affection of brethren towards them; that while they rail or execrate, our language ſhould be that of peace and meekneſs; and this, not with the compoſed exteriour of worldly prudence, but with real and undiſſembled good will. For we are not to withold the offices of loving kindneſs, even from thoſe who hate us: and while they "*deſpitefully uſe*" us, "*and* "*perſecute*" us, our duty is to commend them to God in our fervent prayers.

FROM

FROM ſuch inſtances we learn the true nature of that doctrine we have received; the pure, the perfect and exalted ſpirit of the Goſpel. It is not the extravagance of ſome affectedly ſublime philoſophy. It muſt be acknowledged reaſonable and practicable; unleſs we be ſo infatuated as to conceive, that temperance, humility, and meekneſs, purity and peace, mutual affection, and mutual forbearance, the bleſſings and the ornaments of humanity, are inconſiſtent with human nature. It is not a doctrine unfriendly to human ſociety, or ſubverſive of its intereſt. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and therefore doth not interfere with the arrangements of this world. The governour, the magiſtrate, the citizen, the ſubject, are left to the rights and duties of their reſpective ſtations. He came not to invalidate or deſtroy them, for this would be effectually to deſtroy the Law and the

Prophets.

Prophets. He enjoins, he confirms and enforces them. He teaches the duty of every individual, in every ſtation, both to God and man, effectually, extenſively, from the moſt affecting motives, with the moſt powerful ſanctions. His doctrine indeed is that of an exact and holy diſcipline, which tends to form the temper, to regulate the affections, to purify the heart, to enlarge the ſphere of our loving-kindneſs, to make it uniform, permanent, and perfect; not merely to form our external demeanour ſo as to provide for the intereſts of worldly ſociety; but to order our wills and affections, ſo as to fit us for that glorious community, in which all the little aſſemblies and combinations of this world ſhall be abſorbed and loſt; that bleſſed manſion, where wrath, and ſtrife, and impurity, and impiety and revenge, and malice can have no place or portion.

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It is this great final ſcope and purpoſe by which the goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus is glorioſly diſtinguiſhed from the moſt exalted doctrines of the moſt refined human reaſoners. And for this end it is, that we have been favoured with ſuch gracious diſcoveries of God and his diſpenſations, of his mercies through Chriſt, of the abundance of his goodneſs, and the full weight of his divine juſtice. For this we are furniſhed with a pattern of conſummate righteouſneſs and goodneſs in the example of our Lord; and for this is the aſſiſtance of God's ſpirit promiſed to thoſe who ſeek it, to direct and to ſupport us.

And now, my brethren, it appears that the matter thus briefly treated is of the utmoſt moment and importance to us all. You muſt have already prevented me in the application of it, unleſs you have been careleſs hearers. You muſt have already addreſſed this awful and

affecting

affecting queſtion to your own hearts, "*What manner of men ought we to be,* "*in all holy converſation?*" We, who are children of the light, bleſſed with ſuch ſtupendous diſcoveries of God's mercy; ſent into this life to prepare for the attainment of immortal happineſs; directed in our preſent ſtate of diſcipline by the laws of exalted piety, and purity, of peace, truth, and loving-kindneſs; and perpetually reminded to "*walk wor-*"*thy of the vocation wherewith we are* "*called?*"

Let us then ſeriouſly conſider how we have received theſe ineſtimable bleſſings; and whether the depravity of man hath not deviſed laws of leſs purity, than thoſe of the Goſpel, and means of acceptance more favourable to our indolence and corruption. We have ſometimes heard the doctrine of our being ſaved by faith, urged in ſuch a manner, as if faith conſiſted in the belief of

Chriſt's

Chrift's Gofpel, without effect or influence; or, as if we were to be faved by the merits of our Lord's fufferings, though we do not labour to perform the conditions of his covenant. We have heard of men profeffing themfelves followers of our Lord, and affecting to be called by his name, who have relaxed and wrefted the moral precepts of the Gofpel, debafing and perverting them to their corrupt purpofes. We have known a power of difpenfing with thofe precepts, which Chrift hath declared fhall never pafs away, claimed by a wretched mortal profanely called God's vicegerent.

But while we mark the perverfenefs of others, let us not be partial to our own. In that world in which we are engaged, and in which our religion is profeffed, there are laws eftablifhed by cuftom and fafhion, utterly repugnant to

to the law of Christ. He forbids all private revenge: the world makes such revenge the test of honour. He forbids every approach to impurity and licentiousness: the world declares that they are not to be condemned with severity. He teacheth that all our conversation should be plain, direct, sincere, and candid: the world, that it should be artificial, flattering, dissembling, and deceiving. He commands us to extend our loving-kindness even to enemies: the world, that we should confine it to ourselves. He teacheth us to elevate our hearts above the concerns of mortality: the world, to estimate our happiness and dignity by the perishable advantages of a day. The slightest observation in any sphere or state of life, or perhaps the slightest reflection on our own conduct, may convince us, that men live and act, as if they had one law for publick life, and another for speculation, in our closets and religious assemblies. But, my brethren,

thren, "*we have not so learned Christ*;" we who are here assembled, know and must acknowledge, that he who thus halts between different principles, cannot "*run the race that is set before him*," with constancy and vigour.

Yet even among those who appear most attentive to the duties of religion, God grant there may not be a propensity to deviate from the straight path which religion pointeth out, to seek new ways, and to devise terms of acceptance, more flattering to our weakness and depravity, than those of God's pure and perfect law! If ever we have deceived ourselves with the vain imagination of being justified in the sight of God, by external observances, and devotional exercises, however performed, it is time that we awaken from this delusion. The real value of those things on which we rely, consists in disposing, and regulating, and subduing our affections, to the habitual

practice

practice of true holiness and righteousness. When we are tempted by our indolence to rest securely upon a form of godliness, let us turn to Saint Paul's second Epistle to Timothy. There shall we find a long catalogue of tremendous abominations, which the Apostle declares to be perfectly consistent with a form of Godliness. If we be deceived, we have deceived ourselves. For the general tenour of the Gospel is explicit and direct. It declares loudly and clearly, that true religion doth not consist in the expressions of our lips, or any part, or any fair appearance, of our external deportment; that it hath its residence in the heart; and with a lively and effectual influence should actuate our whole conduct, and reduce every thought and every design to that perfect subjection, which Christ's holy law requires.

And say not, we are insufficient for these things; for our sufficiency is of God.

God. Meditate frequently and devoutly on the promiſes and threatenings of the Goſpel. Think of the end and purpoſe of this gracious diſpenſation: recal them perpetually to view: let the mind be habituated to entertain them gladly; to dwell upon them with reverence and rapture. Uſe thoſe means of grace, which God's mercy hath vouchſafed. Read the word with diligence, and zealous attention. Approach the throne of Grace, with frequent and fervent prayer. Unite conſtantly with the brethren in publick worſhip. Come to the Lord's holy table: and there confirm your reſolutions, and enliven your affections. Thus ſhall the gracious aſſiſting Spirit of the Lord deſcend into our hearts. Our enlightened underſtandings ſhall diſcern and acknowledge the reaſonableneſs of thoſe chriſtian duties which appear ſo grievous to our corruption; and our wills and affections accord with the dictates of reaſon, and the perfect law of God.

And

And if our obedience, as it muſt, be ſtill proportioned to the weakneſs of our nature, God who "*knoweth whereof we are* "*made*," will not be "*extreme to mark* "*what is done amiſs*," through natural frailty, and real imperfection; but will, with the abundance of mercy and condeſcenſion, accept our diligent and ſincere endeavours, through the merits and mediation of Chriſt Jeſus.

and if our obedience, as it must, be still proportioned to the weakness of our nature, God who, "knowing whereof we are made," will not be "extreme to mark what is done amiss," through natural infirmity, and real imperfection; but will, with the abundance of mercy and condescension, accept our diligent and sincere endeavours, through the merits and mediation of Christ Jesus.

SERMON VI.

On the Character of Cornelius.

Preached at ST. ANNE'S DUBLIN.

ACTS, chap. 10. verse 2.

A devout Man, and one that feared God with all his House; who gave much Alms to the people, and prayed unto God always.

AMONG the various instances of God's gracious goodness we may deem it not the least considerable, that the manner in which his good pleasure is revealed in the Gospel, appears of all others the most engaging and conciliating. We are not called to a severe attention

to ſome formal ſyſtem, or ſeries of laws. His will is illuſtrated and enforced in every every way that can influence our reaſonable nature; by narratives, by incidents, by ſimilitudes, by characters and examples, all admirably fitted for inſtruction and correction. Turn to whatever part we may of theſe treaſures of divine knowledge, we meet with ſomething to engage the heart, as well as to direct the underſtanding; ſomething to be received with an earneſtneſs and warmth of affection, to be revolved, and applied to our own immediate occaſions. Look through the whole hiſtory of God's diſpenſations, and we find it, ineſtimable indeed in its intrinſic excellence, yet at the ſame time, full of grace in its minuter circumſtances; like Solomon's "*apples of gold in pictures*" (or caſkets) "*of ſilver*," the richeſt gift, preſented in the faireſt conveyance.

Of

Of this we have a ſtriking inſtance in that part of ſcripture now before us. The hiſtory from which the text is taken, is that of God's calling the Gentile world to the knowledge of the Goſpel. The words contain the character of a Roman Soldier, whom God was pleaſed by an extraordinary diſpenſation, to make partaker of his Grace, through Chriſt Jeſus. And here we are not dazzled with a glittering detail of the ſtations which he filled, the ſervices he performed, the dangers he encountered, the acts of valour he atchieved, or any of thoſe particulars ſo glaring and oſtentatious in the eye of man. Our attention is directed to things of greater value, ſuch as may lie concealed in the tumult of public life, or ſuch as our pride and ignorance may not always hold in due eſteem; but ſuch, as in the ſight of unerring wiſdom are of high regard and honour; I mean the excellencies of his heart and its affections, and the amiable principles

ciples of his private and domestic conduct.

These particulars I shall lay before you; and it must be my purpose, in the second place, to lead you into some useful application of the things "*written for* "*our ensamples.*"

I. And the first particular mentioned by the sacred historian is, that Cornelius was a "*devout man.*" He was indeed one of those called proselytes of the gate; that is, of those Gentiles who acknowledged one God creator and preserver of the world, and had their peculiar court in the Temple, for divine worship, without submitting to the whole Jewish ritual. The portion of knowledge as yet vouchsafed to him had its proper influence. His leading principle was that of reverence for the great Lord of Heaven and earth. He considered himself as a creature formed by his power, preserved

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by his goodneſs, and accountable to his juſtice. He recurred to no falſe or precarious rule of action. He indulged himſelf in no flattering imaginations of his worldly conſequence, as a man of diſtinction, of honour, or any of thoſe vanities by which the reptile of the earth would conceal his vileneſs. With the more dignified humility of a dependent creature, he looked up to the great and gracious author of his being. He ſtood, as in his preſence; he acted, as by his direction; he ſubmitted, as to his good pleaſure. He thus drew from the fountain of living waters, and was ſtrengthened. He fixed on the true light, and in all his ways was ſecurely directed.

For, mark the conſequence of thus wiſely laying his foundation.—He was one that "*feared God, with all his* "*houſe.*" He poſſeſſed his ſoul with reverence of his creator and preſerver. The purity, the juſtice, the goodneſs of this adorable

adorable Being, he revolved devoutly; and the impression was awful and affecting. Thus must every device and imagination of his heart have been wisely regulated: and every propensity to corruption subdued. He who was habituated to set God always before his eyes, could indulge no inordinate desires, harbour no thoughts displeasing to the being "*of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.*" He who walked in a perpetual sense of the divine inspection, must have walked wisely and circumspectly and surely.

Nor was the blessed influence of this his leading principle confined to himself. Like that "*cloud of dew in the heat of* "*harvest*," of which the Prophet speaks, it gave comfort and refreshment to all around him, amidst their worldly labours and perplexities. They of his household had his knowledge conveyed to them, his precepts impressed upon them, his example displayed before them.

Sensible

Sensible of the duties they claimed from him, and ardently solicitous for their happiness, he was their guide and counsellor. The vital flame of piety was thus caught, propagated, and diffused through all his dependents. They too "*feared God*."

But when we delineate the devout and pious character, the child of this world may affect to discover something gloomy and morose, something selfish, contracted, and debased, in that temper which seems to despise all worldly objects, and to extend its views even to the throne of the Almighty. He deems this, servile superstition; and triumphs in, what he calls, the finer social feelings. But the devotion of Cornelius was humane and benevolent: it breathed the true spirit of charity and loving-kindness: for, "*he gave much alms to the people*." He was not confined within the bounds of absolute justice; or taught

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to content himſelf with granting to his neighbour what was claimed as his undoubted right. His religion inſpired him with a tenderneſs of affection for every fellow-creature and every child of the ſame heavenly parent whom he adored. It prompted him to ſupply their wants, to alleviate their diſtreſſes, to live in an active and affectionate diſcharge of all good and gracious offices, diſtributing and communicating, according to his power and the indigencies of thoſe around him, willingly and liberally, with thankfulneſs for the bleſſings he had received, and compaſſion for the neceſſities of others. His benevolence was not diverted by the cares and buſineſs of his profeſſion, not diſſipated by pleaſure, not caſual or limited; but ſteady, perſevering, and abounding.

And now to give the higheſt and compleateſt finiſhing to this character. He was not only careful to poſſeſs his mind

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with true principles of duty both to God and man, but it was his daily concern to preſerve theſe principles in full vigour and perfection: for, he "*prayed unto* "*God always*," that is, at ſtated and frequent periods, publickly and privately. He was duly impreſſed with the perfections of God; and conſtant and fervent adoration was the natural conſequence of this impreſſion. He knew that he was a dependent creature, preſerved and ſupported by the gracious providence of the Almighty: he acknowledged this dependence; and petitioned for this preſervation and ſupport. He was affected by the mercies he had received: and he breathed out his praiſe and thankſgiving. He felt his own frailties and offences; and he implored the divine aſſiſtance and forgiveneſs. He was expoſed to wants and dangers: and he addreſſed himſelf for aid to the all-mighty and all-gracious deliverer.

Such was the character, and ſuch the conduct of this Gentile: for he was a Gentile. He knew not the ſtupendous mercies of God through Chriſt Jeſus. The glad tidings of this ſalvation had not viſited him; nor were life and immortality clearly diſcloſed to him. God, indeed, ſaw him fitted to receive theſe bleſſings. They were, therefore, conveyed to him by a miraculous diſpenſation. For he is faithful who had promiſed, that if any man doth God's will, "*he ſhall know of the doctrine whether it* "*be of God.*"

Nor is it unworthy of obſervation, that the man now deſcribed, appears to have been no recluſe, or ſequeſtered zealot, ſubject to impreſſions of melancholy or enthuſiaſm. Nor was he of thoſe orders of life called vulgar, ſo as to be ſuſpected of any of thoſe ignorant or ſordid prejudices to which debaſing employments are ſuppoſed to give riſe.

I mention

I MENTION theſe particulars, the rather, as I now addreſs myſelf to perſons raiſed above the lower ranks of life, of decent, if not elevated conditions, of general and extenſive intercourſe, inſtructed and experienced.

WE, my brethren, are bleſſed with a full diſcovery of God's gracious mercies. We have the motives and influences of the Goſpel to direct us: we are more eſpecially bound to live and act ſuitably to our privileges and advantages. Let us examine our hearts faithfully and ſincerely. Let us dwell upon the character now diſplayed before us; and impartially compare it with our own. Many, I truſt, can abide ſuch examination without reproach. Yet ſo numerous, and ſo fatally prevailing are the temptations of this world, its ungodly maxims, its agitations and engagements, its pleaſures and ſeductions, that the conſciences of many muſt ſhrink from the

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ſevere trial. Let us ſuppoſe them called to a ſtrict account on the ſeveral particulars ſo honourable to the character of Cornelius: and firſt, as to that reverence and fear of God, the reigning principle, to direct and regulate our actions and affections.

'I have, indeed,' might the man of this world confeſs, 'I have been taught 'the goodneſs and juſtice of the Great 'Author of my being and ſalvation: 'but the object is too awful and over-'powering, for my weakneſs to endure. 'What though the Almighty be not in 'all my thoughts? Yet my dealings are 'fair, friendly, and equitable. What 'the man of religion practiſes in the 'fear of God, I perform from a ſenſe of 'decency, rectitude and honour.' But let us ſeriouſly conſider, whether we are to impute it to the pride or the abaſement of the creature, that he will not turn his thoughts to his Great Author

and

and Preſerver. Hath he underſtanding and diſcernment? He then knoweth the ſource, whence all his bleſſings are derived. And can love and reverence, and gratitude be excluded from his ſcheme of conduct? Is it decency to affect a diſregard to the Being of Infinite Perfection? Is it rectitude to deny our reaſonable ſervice to him in whom "*we* "*live, and move, and have our being?*" Is it honour to receive ineſtimable benefits with indifference? Suppoſing then theſe rules of conduct to be ever ſo correct and uncorrupted; they are yet utterly defective. But not to dwell upon the folly of laying other foundations than God hath laid; let us appeal to experience; let us examine the real influence of this ſenſe of decency, rectitude and honour, as it is obſerved in the world.

It forms the outward deportment, ſo as to gain the favourable opinion of

those around us. It decks the face with smiles, and dictates the most conciliating language to the lips; in which the heart hath little share, and which are often calculated to promote the most selfish, if not the most corrupt purposes. It teacheth justice, where justice is reputable; but permitteth the most flagrant wrong, where it cannot immediately impair our worldly consequence. Instead of a manly opposition to immoral and unreasonable custom, it teacheth an abject compliance to the meanest and most unreasonable prejudices. It wastes the precious moments of our existence, and dissipates the good gifts of Providence, in self-enjoyment, in vanity and ostentation; or in labouring painfully through the foul path of sordid pursuits, unjust designs, and fashionable fraud. Instead of regulating and subduing the unruly affections, it allows them to range freely, and to tyrannize over our rational nature. It looks without

out ſeverity on the purſuit of pleaſures, indulged, if not applauded, by a world blind to their pernicious conſequences. It whiſpers to our pride, that a ſlight, or an imaginary offence is not to be expiated but by the blood of our fellow-creature. It teacheth, that the gratification of our own ſenſual and vain deſires ſhould be the end of all our labours.

And how is the man of worldly principles directed in his duties to thoſe immediately depending on him? He cannot teach his houſe that fear of God which hath not poſſeſſed his own mind. He looks not beyond the preſent period of exiſtence. He cannot, therefore, direct the views of others to more enlarged and ennobled objects. His child is taught to cultivate thoſe qualities, and to labour for thoſe accompliſhments, which may recommend him to the favourable attention and good offices of others. For

this is the avowed end of all his own labours. Or ſhould he be yet aſhamed to deny the neceſſity of religious inſtruction, the charge is conſigned to the hired teacher. He himſelf is too deeply engaged in the occupations of the world, to take any part in a taſk ſo reaſonable, ſo neceſſary, and ſo delightful.

And doth he give "*much alms?*" Is his benevolence vigorous and extenſive? Alas! the reigning principles of his heart confine him to his own intereſt, and his own indulgence. He may not want ſome conſtitutional good-nature: but it is ignorantly and capriciouſly exerted, and eaſily controuled. Shame or vanity may extort his bounty; but loving-kindneſs doth not make its abode with him. His heart is too much occupied to entertain it: nor doth he regard his fellow-creatures in thoſe views which would moſt effectually recommend them to his affection.

affection. He doth not consider them as his own brethren, of his own family, partakers, not only of the same nature, but the same salvation; children of the same Heavenly Father, and heirs of the same covenanted mercy.

And, as to praying unto God always, the man of worldly decency, rectitude and honour, hath neither leisure, nor inclination for the due performance of this service. The adoration of the High and Holy One he leaves to the recluse and disengaged. The supplications of a weak offending creature, the grateful strains of praise, the humble acknowledgment of mercies, he perhaps regards as the effusions of superstitious weakness. At least, his scheme and course of conduct do not include these duties of a reasonable creature. And of the glorious privileges of a christian he hath but a faint and lifeless impression. That this is no unjust or rash surmize, we

have at this hour a proof before us. For how ſhall we elſe account for that total abſence from the publick ſervice of God, which men in active and exalted ſpheres of life ſcarcely conſider as an offence; or for their cold and formal indifference, if at any time, or from any motive, they deign to appear in the congregation?

And are theſe the proper fruits of knowledge and refinement? Are theſe the due returns to that goodneſs which hath raiſed us above the ſtate of ignorance and rudeneſs? No, my brethren, we were not made and redeemed for a life of poliſhed corruption: nor is the duty of a Chriſtian diſcharged by fair and plauſible appearances. He is not called to from his outward demeanour, ſo as to recommend himſelf to the world and to attain the good things of this life, but to form his heart and its affections, ſo as to fit and prepare him for a

life of everlasting joy and exaltation. He is taught to think on whatsoever things are really "*honest*, *lovely*, *or of good* "*report:*" so as to appear amiable and dignified in worldly societies: but he is taught to extend his views far beyond all worldly societies; and to seek the honour which cometh from God, when the little interests and concerns of this world shall be done away.

WHATEVER then may be the principles of the natural man, whether they be defective and imperfect, erroneous or corrupt, we are daily taught the blessed rule of conduct, that habitual fear and reverence of God, which cast so glorious a colouring over all the actions of Cornelius. Cherish and improve it; for it is the "*pearl of great price.*"—The prayers and the alms of Cornelius were accepted as a greatful sacrifice: and a miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit was the immediate reward of his sincerity. The

Christian

Christian who sets God always before his eyes, and cultivates his religious principles with diligence and zeal, may be equally assured, that his prayers and his alms are accepted; that God will visit him with an abundant portion of his spirit; that he hath his sure guide and support amidst the dangers of this precarious state; that his path leadeth to life eternal; and that he shall proceed steadily from strength to strength, till in that awful moment which awaits us, when this earthly tabernacle is ready to be dissolved, he shall look up with confidence and rapture to that glory which shall be revealed.

Alas! of little comfort to the expiring creature will be the reflection, that his days have passed in the business and enjoyments of the world, that his station hath been distinguished, his societies fashionable, his vices concealed, and his follies applauded. The scene of human

vanity

vanity is closing: an awful judge, a tremendous tribunal are now rising to his view. But that he hath lived in the fear of God, that he hath endeavoured to know his will, and to keep his commandments; — here is his consolation. In the midst of pain, and languor and affliction, he looketh up to his hope and refuge, his present help in time of trouble: He feels that there is acceptance for his sincerity, and forgiveness for his backslidings. He breaks the bands of death, even at that awful moment, when its dominion seems uncontroulable; and bursts into the regions of eternal glory and felicity prepared for the faithful servant of God and follower of Christ Jesus.

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FIN

SERMON VII.

Rule to be obſerved in ſoliciting the Favour of our Superiours.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

NUMBERS, chap. xxii. verſe 18.

And Balaam anſwered and ſaid unto the ſervants of Balak, if Balak would give me his houſe full of ſilver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do leſs or more.

THIS ſpirited and determined anſwer appears in the more ſtriking view, when we conſider the preſent ſituation of Balaam. Though dwelling in an idolatrous country, he acknowledged the Supreme Being, and was even favoured with

with divine communications. The superstition of those around him gave extraordinary consequence to his prophetic character. They supposed him possessed of the power of devoting their enemies to destruction by his word. The king of Moab, terrified at the approach of the Israelites, solicits him, with every attention so flattering to human pride, with the most ample and enticing promises of wealth and royal favour, and dignities, to pronounce his curse upon a people whom God had blessed. It seems evident from the history, that Balaam would gladly have complied. But his passions were controuled by a superiour power; strongly as his avarice and ambition might stimulate, the terrours of the Lord were mightier in operation. The king found it necessary to repeat his solicitations. Yet the divine command still maintained its superiority: and Balaam still answered by the declaration of the text.

It

It is not neceſſary to enquire whether Balaam intended to expreſs any natural impoſſibility of his "*going beyond the* "*word of the Lord*;" or to declare his firm purpoſe of adhering to the divine direction, notwithſtanding all that power or greatneſs could beſtow. We do no violence to the text, by conſidering his anſwer in this latter ſenſe. And thus ſhall we be directly led to the purpoſe of this diſcourſe.

All ſcripture we are to regard as written for our admonition. And it is our part to read, to meditate, to deduce ſuch precepts as theſe ſacred records may afford for the direction of our conduct. If then we conſider the paſſage now before us with the leaſt ſerious attention, it is obvious to reflect, that we alſo are powerfully influenced by proſpects of worldly intereſt, that many of the moſt alluring advantages of this world are not to be obtained but by the favour of our ſuperiours:

ſuperiours: that ſchemes for acquiring their favour are already formed in that early period, when hope is lively, and youth aſpiring: nor is there any ſtation ſo obſcure, ſo hopeleſs and abandoned, as not to hold forth ſome advantages to prompt us to ſuch deportment as may conciliate thoſe who, with reſpect to us, may be called great. The purſuit may be innocent; it may be our duty. But the path we are to tread is dangerous. The unexperienced muſt proceed with peculiar caution, and walk by juſt direction.

It is not the buſineſs of this place to detail the various maxims of worldly prudence or artifice, to regulate the demeanour, to compoſe the fair exteriour, to form the aſpect of inſinuation, to teach the language of addreſs. We know and teach only the ſimplicity and ſanctity of our chriſtian profeſſion. It doth not recall us, with a ſevere and

gloomy

gloomy rigour, from the buſineſs and concerns of life. It doth not denounce its terrours againſt the purſuit of preſent intereſts, or the reaſonable attention due to thoſe by whom our intereſts may be promoted. But it reminds us that we have a Superiour in heaven, whoſe favour is infinitely more valuable, whoſe diſpleaſure infinitely more tremendous, than that of the moſt exalted among the children of men. Of his will we have received the cleareſt manifeſtations. And, therefore,

'In the purſuit of worldly intereſts, 'in our endeavours to commend our-'ſelves and our concerns to thoſe above 'us, we have a plain rule for our di-'rection.' "*We cannot go beyond the* "*word of the Lord our God, to do leſs or* "*more.*"

They who are already hardened by a long intercourſe with the corrupt and vitious,

vitious, may regard this rule with indifference or contempt. Let ſuch enjoy the momentary reward of their apoſtacy. They have ſold their birthright; and are too intent on devouring the wretched pittance they have received (if, indeed, they have received it) to reflect on the vileneſs of their fallen ſtate. But to you, my brethren, who have not renounced the hope of your calling, nor forſaken the guide of your youth, it may not be uſeleſs to enforce this rule. And I conſult your edification, by warning you, in the firſt place, of ſome more flagrant inſtances, in which it is too often violated.

THAT man, then, not only "*goes beyond*," but acts in defiance of "*the word of the Lord*," who ſeeks the favour of thoſe above him, by an unreſerved ſubmiſſion to their pleaſure, by blindly reſigning himſelf to their guidance, the ſlave of their paſſions, and

instrument of their purposes, without reserve or scruple. A character condemned by God, scorned by man, and despised by those to whom he is thus subservient. Even to the natural man, I say, his abject state must appear odious and contemptible; though the compliances required were not of the most corrupt and vitious kind. But few persons, it is to be hoped, can descend to such a state whose minds are not already prepared for any foul enormity. Nor is implicit obedience ever required for pure and honest purposes. When servile instruments are employed, it must be to promote such designs as none but servile instrumnets will promote: designs of ambition, fraud, and circumvention, cruelty and oppression. And if the vileness of such instruments could admit of any aggravation, it might be observed, that they are oftentimes the slaves of those, who have submitted to the slavery of administering to the like vices of

other

other men; the laſt of a long ſeries of paſſive dependents, who have ſacrificed all that is virtuous and praiſe-worthy, all that befits the name, I will not ſay of a chriſtian, but of a human creature, to the gratification of ſome ſordid paſſion: an order of beings too contemptible for reprehenſion, were not their vileneſs oftentimes concealed in the ſplendour of worldly proſperity; and were it not therefore neceſſary to diſplay their true deformity to the unexperienced.

Learn alſo a juſt abhorrence of the man who although he hath not abilities or opportunities to promote the wicked deſigns of thoſe above him; yet, to gain their favour, deſcends to be the companion and encourager of their private vices: who ſtudies their paſſions and favourite corruptions, that he may conform to them, and thus make them the agents of his purpoſes. Dreadful and horrible profligacy! when ſinners are encouraged

couraged and confirmed, and at the ſame time load themſelves with the additional guilt of encouraging and confirming their aſſociates in ſin: when the ſuperiour and the dependant, alike corrupting and corrupted, walk hand in hand in the ways of wickedneſs, animating and aſſiſting each other in the fatal progreſs; till, led to the utmoſt point of depravity, they ſeize the "*ſeat of the ſcorner*," "*glory in their own ſhame*," and pour the impotent virulence of their contempt upon every thing upright, excellent and honourable.

Abject Flattery is another method of engaging the favour of ſuperiours, utterly repugnant to the integrity of our profeſſion, as well as to the dignity of our nature. And ſhameful is the ſucceſs with which it is too often practiſed. For rank and ſtation are not always attended with enobled ſentiments, or firm and exalted underſtanding. On the contrary,

they are ſometimes diſgraced by vanity and weakneſs, as well as by the groſſer vices. In this caſe, the man inſenſible to the principles of truth and virtue hath an ample field for the purſuit of his intereſted ſchemes. Every action, every word, every look of his ſuperiour affords him perpetual occaſions of ſtealing imperceptibly into his affection. He may be too uſeleſs to be made his agent; or as yet too mean to be admitted as his vitious aſſociate; yet ſtill he hath his reſource, in the aſſiduouſneſs of attention, the obſequiouſneſs of ſubmiſſion: the lying tongue which echoes the language of vice, and applauds the effuſions of folly, and the falſe look, where a ſmile of adulation and ſervility dwells conſtantly and habitually, ever ready to dilate with hypocritical approbation, and affected pleaſure.

But men may be too converſant in the refinements of worldly ſubtlety to

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assume the direct and less disguised modes of adulation. They may affect simplicity; they may speak the language of plain, undesigning, artless sincerity; yet in this deceitful garb they may impose on their superiours by falshoods no less odious than those of servility and submission: by lying insinuations suggested by jealousy and envy; malicious representations of those who are suspected to be competitors for favour, and perhas known to be more deserving; by dark and fraudulent artifices for supplanting them, or for building an interest on their ruin; by false assurances, and insiduous advice, in consequence of which men are often driven to the ruin of their fortune, or their fame, for the purposes of a selfish dependant.—But I shall not dwell upon what your own reflections will naturally supply.

Let it be sufficient to observe, lastly, that although we may not proceed to

the more violent outrages on religion and morality, in our intercourse with those above us; yet still we go "*beyond the word of the Lord*," if in the assiduity of our attention to a superiour, if in the indulgence of vanity or the pursuits of interest, we forget the more important purposes of our condition, or sacrifice the duties here allotted to us, whatever these may be: if we court his smiles, or seek his favour to advance us to some higher station, by shewing that we are utterly negligent, and of consequence unworthy of that which we already enjoy: in a word, if the effect of subservience to our fellow-creature be, in any degree, to relax our diligence in the service of our Creator.

I do not mean, by this detail, that men devoted to the little interests of the world, confine themselves to some one of these, or such like, wicked means of advancing their interests. The service

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of the world is too ſevere and rigorous not to require a more compleat and abſolute ſubmiſſion, a total renunciation of every good principle, and a complication of odious and vitious practices of every kind.—Such is oftentimes their wretched ſervitude, who pride themſelves in their worldly wiſdom; who affect appearances of conſequence and dignity; who are themſelves perhaps (amidſt all their humiliation and ſubmiſſion to thoſe above them) careſſed, flattered, and envied; and preſume to lift up their profane voices againſt integrity and ſingleneſs of heart: as if an open avowal, and ſhameleſs triumph could efface their guilt, or ſcoffing and deriſion confound all diſtinctions between good and evil.

I HAVE contented myſelf for the moſt part with barely pointing out the vitious practices of thoſe, who in their worldly purſuits, tranſgreſs the bounds of virtue and religion; becauſe they are

ſuch

ſuch as cannot be reconciled, even to themſelves, but by diſguiſe and fallacy. Unbiaſſed reaſon at once diſcovers and acknowledges their guilt and baſeneſs. —And now, while your hearts are yet uncorrupted; before ye are entered on a dangerous career, in which ye may be quickly hardened againſt all the reproaches of conſcience, let us ſeriouſly conſider what are the advantages, for which men thus renounce the true glory and happineſs of their nature.

Riches, honours, power, ſtation and diſtinction, with all their flattering appendages.—And are theſe the conſtant infallible rewards of ſervile aſſiduity, envious craft, abject and profligate condeſcenſions? No. You will frequently obſerve ſuch arts repaid with vain aſſurances, fruitleſs attendance, fantaſtical hopes, diſappointment, vexation, remorſe, contempt, and ridicule. But ſuppoſe them at length inveſted with the

plenitude

plenitude of worldly prosperity. Yet this is but "*the prosperity of fools*," poisoned by the vices of a corrupt possessor. Are those riches a real blessing which serve to precipitate the ruin of the libertine? Or those worldly honours and distinctions, which cannot even secure the unworthy from that disregard and contempt which appear so hideous to his pride? which raise up his vileness and corruptions to the general view; at the very time while he fondly hopes that they are concealed in the little circle of his pretended admirers; and that the clamours of indignation are silenced, because his own ears are possessed with the voice of flattery? Scorn and hatred, envy and invective, turbulence and distraction, contention and animosity, terrour and anxiety, corroding passions, pain and disease: such are the worldly blessings purchased at the expence of conscience and religion.

But

But let us ſuppoſe for a moment, that the real enjoyment of thoſe worldly advantages purſued with ſo much eagerneſs, exactly correſponded with their exteriour allurements; that however obtained or applied, they had an intrinſic value, without the leaſt allay of diſappointment or diſguſt: Yet how ſhort is their duration! I ſpeak not of the ſtrange viciſſitudes of human affairs, the ſevere reverſes of fortune, from which no man is exempted, and to which the corrupt and vitious are particularly expoſed. Suppoſe, I ſay, that worldly advantages could be inſeparably annexed to our preſent ſtate, yet this ſtate cannot be of long continuance, and may determine with the ſucceeding moment. Imagine, then, the man who without remorſe or ſcruple hath forced his way to pleaſures, riches, and diſtinction, through the moſt ſacred bounds; imagine him arrived at that ſolemn period when death appears to tear him from his enjoyments. The gay ſcene of

pomp

pomp and ſplendour is now cloſing; and all the labour of his days ready to paſs away "*like a tale that is told.*" In that gloomy night of pain and weakneſs, in which he lies undiſtinguiſhed from the meaneſt and wretchedeſt of his fellow mortals, to which of his Idols ſhall he turn for relief or comfort? Can worldly policy elude the ſtroke of the deſtroyer? Can wealth corrupt him, power controul him, or grandeur diſmay him? Can dignities or titles allay the anguiſh of an expiring ſinner; when "*the worm*" is ready to be "*ſpread un-*" "*der*" him? or the breath of flattery whiſper peace and conſolation, when "*Hell from beneath is moved for*" him "*to meet*" him "*at*" his "*coming?*" Or what avails that wanton indifference, that levity and ſcorn, which, in the hour of his proſperity, inſulted every thing reverend and ſacred, when his ſoul departs with "*a fearful looking for of*" "*judgment,*" too terrible to dwell upon.

If then ye would not be deceived and betrayed in your worldly purſuits; if in the awful moment of diſſolution ye would ſecure that peace which paſſes all that this world can beſtow; fix your attention on the ſure guide and light of your paths, the "*word of the Lord*" our "*God*." And it is no rigorous or ſevere director. It teaches us, indeed, that we put not our "*truſt in any child of man*," ſo as to forget God; and to abandon the ſervice of a Heavenly Maſter for that of a capricious, vain, corrupted creature: but, it leaves us to the free purſuit of whatever worldly enjoyments may be acquired by integrity and humility, by benevolence and active zeal in every thing good and praiſe-worthy, every thing connected with the honour of God, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures. Whatever we may acquire, it teaches us to render truly valuable: wherever we may be unſucceſsful, it gives us that chearful reſignation which

takes

takes away the ſting of diſappointment. But above all things, it conducts us to thoſe great objects which are worthy the regard of immortal creatures. However deſpiſed, depreſſed, or abandoned to neglect or obſcurity, to indigence or misfortune, it caſts a glory round our moſt humbled ſtate, and gives tranſport even to the extremity of diſtreſs: for it points the way to the bleſſed inheritance of thoſe who have not "*gone aſtray, following the way of Balaam the ſon of "Boſor, who loved the wages of unrighteouſneſs.*"

Let the wages of unrighteouſneſs periſh with the unrighteous! We are called to the ſure enjoyment of riches and pleaſures, "*incorruptible, eternal in "the heavens:*" to the favour of the Gracious Diſpenſer of "*every good and "perfect gift,*" to the honour and glory which ſhall one day crown his faithful ſervants in the preſence of men and angels:

angels: "*unto Mount Sion, and unto the* "*city of the living God, the heavenly Je-* "*rusalem, and to an innumerable company* "*of angels; to the general assembly and* "*church of the First Born, which are* "*written in heaven; and to God the judge* "*of all; and to the spirits of just men* "*made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator* "*of the New Covenant.*" To him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour and glory, now and for ever!

SERMON VIII.

Destination of a Christian.

I CORINTHIANS, chap. ix. verse 25.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown: but we an incorruptible.

TO understand the full force and import of these words, it is necessary to consider the allusion of St. Paul, the similitude he employs, and the purpose to which he applies it.

THE people to whom he writes, as well as all the Greeks, were remarkably addicted

addicted to ſhews and publick aſſemblies, which were held at ſtated times, and in which they were entertained with various bodily exerciſes. One of the moſt diſtinguiſhed of theſe games was celebrated at Corinth: the celebration of them was a matter of national concern: and the prize beſtowed on the Conquerour, though in itſelf of little value, was yet accounted a diſtinction highly honorable; even to a degree, ſcarcely conceivable by thoſe of colder tempers than this lively people. They who aſpired to this prize ſubmitted to a long courſe of previous diſcipline. They abſtained from every thing that might impair their vigour or activity. From their early years they were inured to this regimen in its utmoſt ſeverity; and trained up in ſuch a courſe of life, as might prepare them for their publick appearance, for conquering, and receiving their crown. This is what the Apoſtle expreſſes in the text. "*Every man that ſtriveth for the maſ-*

"*tery*;"

"*tery*;"—every man that contendeth in your games, and would excel his antagonist, "*is temperate in all things*;"—is obliged to submit to a long course of abstinence and labour, to qualify him for contending and excelling.

Now, the Christian is frequently compared to the antagonist in these games, and his duty illustrated by allusions to them. Thus, we are exhorted to "*run* "*the race that is set before us*;" to "*fight the good fight*," or, as the words strictly signify, to contend in the good exercise "*of faith*." "*I therefore so* "*run*," saith the Apostle, "*not as un-* "*certainly*;" but like your racers, with a strict attention to the rule and order of my course. "*So fight I, not as one* "*that beateth the air*," not as one of your unskilful combatants, whose stroke is not pointed directly against his adversary. "*But I keep under my body, and* "*bring it into subjection*," I use the same strictness

ſtrictneſs of diſcipline with him, who would be victorious in your exerciſes: "*leſt that by any means, when I have* "*preached to others, I myſelf ſhould be a* "*caſt-away:*" ſhould be reprobated and rejected (like one of your antagoniſts who had not contended duly and therefore not ſucceſsfully) at the very time that I am preaching to others:—*preaching*, or *proclaiming*, and diſcharging an office ſimilar to that of herald in theſe publick games, who directed and encouraged the combatants, preſented their prize to view, proclaimed the conditions of their conteſt, and declared the conquerour. So that no ſimilitude could be choſen more happily, to repreſent the office of an Evangeliſt.

In the text, we have the ſame alluſions, together with a direct application of them, to the great purpoſe of the apoſtle. If, ſaith he, one of the antagoniſts in your games, ſhall ſubmit to a

long

long and rigid course of discipline, to obtain the frivolous distinction of a day; what should be the care and vigilance, and patience of the christian, in this his state of preparation for another life, when he aspires to a crown of glory, eternal, incorruptible in the heavens?

My brethren! were the apostle to address himself immediately to the men of this generation, he might possibly recur to other allusions. He might direct their attention to those, whose lives are engaged in the pursuit of riches, honours, station, or any worldly advantage. He might point out the care and assiduity with which their favourite object is pursued; their toil and anxiety, rising early, and being late to take rest, resigning every enjoyment that may retard their progress, and enduring every difficulty that may promote it; and this from a precarious expectation of things, which never may be obtained; if obtained,

may disappoint their hopes; or, should they correspond with their gayest expectations, must be speedily resigned. He might say to his disciple, learn of the worldly-minded and his labours; and consider with how much greater care and diligence, and self-denial, should he proceed, who seeks the blessings of an immortal state, which he is sure to obtain by his faithful efforts; which, when obtained, shall infinitely surpass his hopes; and which never can be taken from him? It is, indeed, with shame and confusion of face, that the best among us must reflect on that difference of care and solicitude with which his present interests, and those of an eternal existence, are pursued. And nothing but deep, serious, and repeated reflection can correct the impressions now made on our senses and imaginations, can counteract the force of present allurements, and give us a lively as well as rational conviction of the value of our final destination.

To

To awaken us from indifference and insensibility it is, that our attention is recalled to the observation of the text. And it shall be my present purpose to consider what instruction and correction may naturally be deduced from it.

First, then, the observation of the apostle teacheth every christian to consider that he hath one great object, which should be ever kept in view; and on which his heart and its affections should be fixed firmly and invariably: I mean the happiness of another life, and the glory which hath been revealed by Christ Jesus. He is not left to the painful deductions of unassisted reason, to give him some wavering, some obscure, some precarious expectation of futurity. His expectation is earnest, for he knows whom he hath believed. The word of truth hath declared, that he was not made and redeemed to crawl for a few days on earth, and to confine himself

to the wretched objects of mortality. He, therefore, looketh in full confidence to his abiding place; and knoweth and is assured, that his proper residence, and indeed his proper existence, is with the holiest and most exalted of God's creatures, amidst the unutterably valuable treasures of divine goodness.

He is, in the next place, to consider that his present state is a state of discipline and preparation, in which he is to be taught, trained, and qualified, both to attain and to enjoy his final happiness. In this mortal sojourn then, he may be compared to a child in his course of early discipline; in which he is to conform to rule, to receive instruction, to practise, and to perform what is prescribed, in order to acquire some particular accomplishments. In like manner, the christian is now, in what may be called a state of pupilage; not yet arrived at his final course of action and

 enjoyment,

enjoyment, but to be formed and provided for it, by previous exercise, by the practice of those duties which God requires in his present state, and had graciously appointed for the purpose of his salvation, and by fixing such habits and dispositions in his mind, as, by God's gracious assistance, may prepare him for the enjoyment of eternal happiness. This is a consideration of such infinite importance, that we find it repeatedly enforced in the holy scriptures, and illustrated by various similitudes adapted to our conceptions. Sometimes we are represented as servants entrusted with various portions of our Lord's riches, and rewarded according to our faithful application and improvement of them; sometimes as husbandmen patiently enduring the toil of tilling and of sowing, from a confident assurance of reaping the glorious harvest, in God's appointed time; and in the text, as men contending for a crown of never-fading glory,

and

and bound by all the rules of true wisdom, to make their whole present course of conduct subservient to the attainment of it.

When we know and have experienced how forcibly the things of this world impress our minds, how we are embarrassed and entangled by them, how readily our weakness and corruptions yield to their allurements, it is of great moment to every individual among us, as he would not fall from the station in which God hath placed him, as he would not forfeit the glorious inheritance prepared for him, frequently and seriously to consider the great purpose of his present being, and to possess his mind with sentiments suited to his final destination. Perhaps he is dazzled with the splendour of this world, and considers what is now granted or denied him, as of real and intrinsic value. Perhaps he feels his own abasement, when he surveys the good

things

things poſſeſſed by others. Let him then awaken from the viſions of this mortal ſtate, whether they ariſe to delight him, or to diſtreſs him. Let him fix his thoughts on the real and ſubſtantial happineſs of a redeemed creature. Let him conſider, that God, by calling us all equally to ſalvation, hath beſtowed his abundant mercy equally on all, without reſpect to worldly condition, which in his ſight is altogether lighter than vanity itſelf. It is not being arrayed gorgeouſly, or faring ſumptuouſly, or enjoying preſent eaſe or elegance, or living in the pride of life, that conſtitutes the dignity and happineſs of creatures ſuch as we are. Favoured and diſtinguiſhed, as we have been, by the divine mercy, we are to look up to higher things. That we are called to eternal life, that we are fitted to the attainment of it: this is our glory and our joy. And this ſhould be ever kept in view, to regulate all our

conduct,

conduct, in the present stage of our existence; to direct all our pursuits and desires to the final aim and object of a christian.

And when we estimate the things of this life according to their real nature and value; when we regard them, as the occasions and opportunities of making our calling and election sure; and when our hearts are firmly fixed on our final destination; we shall not think the precept of the text severe or gloomy. We shall readily acknowledge, that like a competitor for the prize of bodily exercises, the christian, in his state of discipline, should be "*temperate in all* "*things*:" in all his pursuits and enjoyments, and in all the indulgences of his animal nature. If he looks to a life of immortal happiness, he must, of consequence take especial care, that his affections be duly regulated, and his appetites

petites ſubdued; that they may not impede or retard him in his race: that his ſoul be not imbruted by the foulneſs and extravagance of his preſent gratifications: that he keep his proud and angry paſſions in due ſubjection; that the crooked ways may be made ſtraight, and the rough ways plain; and that every obſtacle in the path he is to tread, be carefully avoided, or effectually removed. All this is enjoined, in that ſtrength and boldneſs of expreſſion peculiar to Saint Paul. "*They that are* "*Chriſt's*," ſaith he, "*have crucified the* "*fleſh, with its affections and luſts*:" have rejected, renounced, and utterly torn away from them, as deteſtable and vile, every worldly affection, every carnal indulgence, that may diſappoint their final hopes, or turn them fatally away from their chriſtian progreſs.

THESE are the dictates of reaſon. But in our weakneſs and perverſions, we are not

not always guided by the dictates of reaſon. Temptations aſſail us; allurements ſeduce us. We are involved in the tumult and turbulence of the world: we are captivated by its pleaſures; intoxicated by proſperity, or wrung with proud impatience, and unmanly anguiſh, by diſtreſs. We are then in a ſituation truly perilous. We are in danger of falling finally and irrecoverably. And if remorſe and ſelf-condemnation could avert this danger, the worſt and vileſt among us could eaſily make his calling and election ſure. But be not deceived. Vigorous exertions and ſelf-government, habitual reflection and meditation, petitions frequently repeated for divine aſſiſtance, can alone enable us to look with confidence beyond the ſphere of preſent objects, and to act with ſteadineſs, for the glorious purpoſe of ſalvation.

The ſlave of worldly corruption, whoſe conſcience is not yet compleatly ſtupified,

ſtupified, may feel its terrours, and endeavour to allay them. He may hope by ſome future repentance, to turn away the wrath denounced againſt his doings. And God grant that he may be ſpeedily and effectually awakened to a piercing ſenſe of his danger! But there is a danger which perhaps he hath not duly conſidered. He hath formed his corrupt and ſenſual habits. He already feels the conſequences, in the darkneſs of his underſtanding, and foulneſs of his affections; in his gradual declenſion from every thing good and praiſe-worthy, even to a brutiſh vileneſs. It were preſumption to expect, that the gracious Spirit which he hath long and obſtinately reſiſted, will, at any period of his exiſtence, totally change his nature, or cleanſe him from thoſe pollutions he hath wilfully contracted. And if ſo, how unſpeakably tremendous muſt be his future ſtate! There his habits and affections muſt ſtill attend him, and

render

render him not only unworthy, but incapable, of the joys of eternity. In the mansions of our father's house there are no carnal indulgences, no worldly pleasures or pursuits, no frivolous amusement, no bitterness, or strife, or wrath, or clamour and evil speaking, no faction or contention: and therefore no gratification for those who, by long use and indulgence, know no other gratifications. The wretch thus debased and defiled hath but one proper mansion, in outward darkness with the Devil and his angels.

That I may endeavour to set this matter in a strong and striking light: It is intimated in scripture, that the christian, and of consequence, those virtues and graces which constitute the christian, are at present, in the state of seed sown in the earth. But that in a future life, the seed duly deposited in the soil duly prepared, shall spring up, shall open and

enlarge

enlarge itſelf to an aſtoniſhing degree of beauty and magnificence. So that the fruit ſhall be the exalting of his nature, even to the glory and perfection of the Angelic orders. By a like manner of reaſoning we ſeem warranted to conclude, that the man who now abandons himſelf to vitious and corrupt affections, is ſowing the ſeed of future miſery; and that his odious qualities ſhall hereafter ſpring up, ſhall be expanded, and enlarged, and unfolded, to the utmoſt degree of vileneſs and foulneſs, ſo as not only to make him a fit companion for the angels of darkneſs, but to convert and transform him into one of theſe, and to render his nature truly and intrinſically deviliſh. Of ſuch moment is our preſent conduct. And ſo tremendous are the conſequences of careleſſneſs or perverſeneſs in this ſtate of preparation for futurity.

If then the promiſes and threatenings of the Goſpel be not vain and fictitious; if our Lord hath, indeed, brought life and immortality to light; if he hath taught us to be watchful and diligent in this our day, let the things now delivered be ſeriouſly laid to heart. Let every hearer aſk his conſcience, that faithful and impartial witneſs, 'have I 'duly conſidered this life, and the par-'ticular circumſtances in which Provi-'dence hath placed me, as a preparatory 'ſtate in which, by the aſſiſtance of 'God's grace, I am to work out my 'own ſalvation? Have I uſed all dili-'gence to improve thoſe opportunities 'which God hath granted for this bleſſed 'purpoſe? Have I ſtored my mind with 'thoſe diſpoſitions and cultivated thoſe 'affections, whoſe fruit is eternal life, 'in righteouſneſs and holineſs, in tem-'perance and purity, in peace and 'loving-kindneſs? If ſo, I am aſſured, 'that in due time I ſhall reap, if I faint

'not.

'not. Or, have I resigned myself to 'the delusions of this mortal state? Have 'I indulged freely in every carnal grati-'fication; been harrassed in the pursuits 'of vanity, subdued by the temptations 'and allurements of the world, insensi-'ble to my final destination, and unaf-'fected by the glory which shall be re-'vealed? I am then treasuring up wrath 'against the day of wrath. I am sow-'ing iniquity and misery; and I am 'assured that "*whatsoever a man soweth,* "*that shall he also reap.*" I have re-'nounced the station to which I was 'appointed. And, woe is me! I am a 'miserable out-cast from God's mercy.'

But the state of those who now assemble before God, may not be so deplorably desperate. They have not utterly renounced the hopes of their calling, nor become utterly insensible to the glory reserved for them. But they may be weak and wavering and irresolute in

preparing

preparing for it. Alas! it is not promised to the weak and wavering and irresolute. Nor can, "*the hands that hang* "*down*" or "*the feeble knees*" engage successfully in the Christian contest; nor is for these the glorious reward of victory "*laid up*," or to be expected.

Let us then summon every important and affecting consideration to our assistance. Let us lay to heart the unutterable value of our crown: let us seriously and frequently consider the vast importance of our present day, the only period in which we may labour to obtain it. How long the present day may be vouchsafed to us, is known only to the great disposer of all things. Let not then our care and vigilance be suspended; no, not for a moment: when every moment hath its appointed work, and the hour is unknown, wherein God shall demand an account of our stewardship.

ſhip. With many among us, the day is far ſpent. And if our appointed ſervice ſtill remains to be performed, and the appointed ſeaſon hath been hitherto neglected, or not duly improved, the conſequence is obvious; that while we are yet ſpared, we ſhould uſe ten-fold diligence, to ſubdue our corrupt affections, to reform our vitious habits, to cultivate thoſe bleſſed diſpoſitions which are well-pleaſing to God, and to invite that gracious aſſiſting-ſpirit to dwell within us, by whom we are enlightened and enlivened.

Alas! my brethren, there are no other motives to be preſt upon our hearts, but thoſe which have too often been received with indifference. We can but be again and again entreated to conſider the value of eternity, the uncertainty of this life, the neceſſity of improving it, before the ſilent lapſe of time ſhall involve us in that night, when

no man can work. Let them at length be duly weighed, and they muſt prove mighty in operation: for they are the moſt powerful and affecting motives that can be propoſed to a reaſonable creature. God! of thine abundant mercy, grant that they may ſink deep into our hearts, to the reforming and renewing and reſtoring them to thee and thy appointed ſervice: that we may zealouſly aſpire and happily attain to that eternal glory, which thou haſt promiſed to the faithful and the diligent, through thy Son our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.

SERMON IX.

The Folly and Danger of Irresolution.

ST. LUKE, chap. ix. verse 59.

And he said unto another, follow me: but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

AMONG other internal evidences of truth, which the history of our Lord affords, there is one, not indeed the most forcible, yet well worthy of regard. I mean, that variety which it displays of characters and incidents which men call natural: which are consonant to common experience, and of consequence engage our favourable attention, set the ingenuous mind on reflecting and apply-

ing, and are thus profitable for correction and instruction. Of this we have an instance now before us. And the brief account of that disciple mentioned in the text may be found worthy of our serious and devout reflection.

He had been a hearer of the doctrines and witness of the miracles of our Lord. He acknowledged the wisdom and power of his ministry; and seems to have been convinced and affected both by his words and works. But when solemnly called to the office of an Evangelist, to forsake all the alluring objects of this world, and to become the follower of him who had not "*where to lay his head*," he hesitated. He had not courage, to break through every obstacle, to spurn at every allurement, and to encounter every severity, of which our Lord's followers were warned. He could not entirely disclaim the service required of him; but he found some pretence for

delay. He had a father full of years. He wiſhed to attend firſt on him and his concerns; to ſweeten the few days he had yet to live; to depoſit his remains dutifully in the grave; and when freed from theſe worldly cares, then, to obey the invitation of his gracious maſter.

The apology was plauſible; nor could our Lord condemn the decent diſcharge of any ſocial duties. But the pretence of diſcharging theſe was not be pleaded to him who diſcerned the heart, when a more urgent and momentous duty required the whole man, and his immediate ſervice. "*Let the dead bury* "*their dead*," ſaith our Lord; "*but go* "*thou and preach the kingdom of God.*" 'There are enough to attend to the or-'dinary concerns of life; men ſpiritually 'dead, devoid of that enlivening grace, 'which would lead them to more eno-'bled and important objects. Let ſuch 'engage in the concerns to which they

'are

'are fitted. Thou art demanded to a 'greater work: and without delay or 'hesitation, go thou, and proclaim the 'glad tidings of mercy and immorta-'lity.'

Such is the history of this disciple. And let it be our part to consider what useful instruction may be derived from it.

That gospel, which this man was called to preach, we have received. We know, and by thus assembling in the house of prayer, we acknowledge, our sacred obligation to be followers of Christ Jesus. If we have followed him with chearfulness and diligence, great is our reward: and the business of this place, is but to exhort you to "*a patient con-*"*tinuance in well doing.*" But by indulging in the enjoyments, and engaging in the occupations, of this world, we are in danger of gradually acquiring

a distaste

a diſtaſte for ſpiritual things. Their importance is indeed forcibly repreſented by our conſciences. But, buſied as we are about many things, we reſerve ſuch repreſentations to be conſidered at a time of leiſure. Our anſwer is the ſame with that of Felix,—"*Go thy way for this* "*time; when I have a convenient ſeaſon,* "*I will call for thee.*"

They who name the name of Chriſt, yet live in the commiſſion of any heinous ſin, evidently repugnant to the laws of nature and of grace, hoping that God will yet grant them time for amendment and reconciliation,——ſuch men, I ſay, act ſo abſurdly, that their conduct would be the object of contempt and abhorrence, were we not bound to recal even theſe mockers of the Almighty from the errour of their ways. But the caſe of thoſe to whom I now addreſs myſelf, reſembles more nearly that of the diſciple in the text. They

may

may not have proceeded to the more enormous instances of guilt. They may acknowledge the importance of a christian life. They know that they were not made for a few days of mortality. They look, though with no steady eye, to the glory which shall be revealed. Alas! they are engaged, embarrassed, entangled, and absorbed in worldly pursuits. They confess that a religious course of life, forms the real happiness of man; yet they do not pursue it steadily: and when awakened to reflection, they lament, yet palliate their inconsistency. There are impediments to obstruct them. Occupations, cares, distractions, are the Lions in their way. 'Suffer me first, O 'God, (for this is the real petition of 'such a person) to indulge in the plea-'sures of youth, to engage in the con-'cerns of manhood, to labour for riches, 'honour, and distinction. Suffer me first 'to force my way through the conten-'tions and competitions of the world,

'to

'to a ſtate of that advantage on which 'my heart is fixed. Then ſhall my 'deſires be ſatisfied and my paſſions 'compoſed. Then will I follow thee, 'and in full leiſure proſecute the glo-'rious purpoſes of my creation and re-'demption.'

Let thoſe who hear me examine their conſciences, and conſider whether their conduct be conformable to this deſcription. We are called to the ſervice of God. Hath any worldly object interfered with this ſervice, or been preferred to it? If our hearts condemn us, let us ſeriouſly conſider what it is my purpoſe to lay before you,

First, the weakneſs and folly;

And ſecondly, the extreme danger of ſuch a conduct.

I. The

I. The weakness of it, is at once obvious. We acknowledge (I have supposed) that a godly and christian life is the first great duty, and chief happiness of a man. Why then should it not be made the first leading object of our attention and solicitude? For herein is true wisdom, that we proportion our desires and pursuits to the value of those good things we seek. Now, "*the* "*things which are seen are temporal; but* "*the things which are not seen are eter-* "*nal.*" Such is the declaration of the Apostle. And not the utmost power of human utterance could more effectually recommend the things which belong to salvation, or mark with greater force their stupendous superiority.

Go to the children of this world, and learn of them. How would they despise the infatuation of that man, who, captivated by some trifling amusements, should neglect the serious interests of mortality,

mortality, or ſuſpend the purſuits neceſſary to his preſent well-being, until he had firſt indulged in uſeleſs vanity, and yielded to the allurements of a frivolous imagination. His follies would be juſtly derided. But if it be folly to be ſeduced from our eſſential intereſts by the meaneſt trifles, God grant, that he who ſitteth in the heavens may not laugh us to ſcorn, and that the Lord himſelf may not have the wiſeſt among us in deriſion!

But there are difficulties and diſcouragements in our preſent ſituation. We are not yet ſufficiently compoſed to liſten to the voice of reaſon and religion. We muſt wait until the days of fervour and gaiety are paſt; for the maturity of years; for the moment when buſineſs ſhall ceaſe, and agitation ſubſide. We muſt arrive at ſome advantageous point of ſtation or condition, before we can "*run the race that is ſet before us.*"—

And

And hath God indeed promised to make us rich or great or powerful; to place us in what we call the comfort and enjoyment of this world, before he requires our service? Hath he declared that, for us, "*every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low*;" or that "*the crooked shall be made straight*, "*and the rough places plain*," that the indolent and indifferent may proceed securely through an easy and flowery path, to the regions of immortal glory?——No, my brethren! our present state is a state of conflict. We are to force our way to our eternal destination through trials and difficulties. "*The kingdom of* "*heaven*," saith our Lord "*suffereth vio-* "*lence, and the violent take it by force*." Salvation is freely offered, but force and firmness of resolution only can lay hold upon it. In this our day of discipline, the zealous, the determined, and the persevering, they who to their serious impressions of religion add frequent and de-

vout

vout reflection, to their reflection vigilance, and their vigilance conſtant and fervent prayer; they, and only they, can ſecure the bleſſings of their inheritance. Have we conſidered the tranſcendent value of this object? And can the man who boaſts of reaſon ſuſpend the purſuit of it, becauſe his ſituation may have its embarraſſments, its diſtreſſes or inconveniences? Whatever may be our preſent inconveniences, we are taught, not only to ſupport, but to convert them into ineſtimable bleſſings. Inſtead of obſtructions, they are really the means and occaſions of making "*our calling* "*and election ſure.*" But when there are no real inconveniences, when we ſuffer our hearts to fix on ſome imaginary advantages; when they poſſeſs us, and detain us from our eſſential concerns, can we acquit ourſelves of the odious charge of being "*without underſtanding?*" A charge, which we ſhall one day acknowledge before men and angels, when every

deluſion

delusion shall vanish, and every enticing object of this world be done away for ever.

But we say, that the things on which we are engaged, are not frivolous or fantastical. They are essential to the welfare of our family, of our dependents, they concern the interests of all around us; and therefore are not permitted only, but commanded.——Why then should we convert them into obstacles to the pursuit of glory and immortality? They are a part of that course of duty to which God's promises are annexed. But we are not called to perform only a part.

Let us give what plausible colouring we may to our worldly pursuits, yet when they become immoderate, when they engage the whole man, and influence his whole conduct, they are irrational as well as criminal. For he hath

chosen

chosen what he confesses to be the worse part; and his service consists of pain and toil and self-denial severer than the severest difficulties he could encounter in the service of God. The fleeting advantages of mortality cost him more than the purchase of an immortal inheritance. Surely nothing but the melancholy view of human conduct could familiarize us to that infatuation, which defers the pursuit of inestimable blessings, which we cannot fail to obtain but by deferring the pursuit of them; and, lured by present objects, grasps at what we cannot certainly obtain, and what cannot certainly reward our expectations.

II. But the irresolute and indolent, who acknowledge the service which they owe to God, yet plead their worldly difficulties against the immediate performance of it, act still worse than weakly and foolishly. And it behoves them seriously to call to mind (what I proposed

proposed to consider in the second place) the great and alarming danger of their conduct.

And here we need but recur to those obvious considerations suggested by our state of mortality. We know that every moment of our day hath its appointed work: and that if it be neglected but for a little, our labour is encreased, and our abilities to support it, dreadfully diminished. We know (for the fatal experience of every moment conveys and confirms this knowledge) that the night is at hand: and no man can be assured that he will not be immediately involved in it. Should it fall suddenly upon him, in the midst of all his projects and pursuits, what shall he say "*when God* "*riseth up?*"—'Lord! I knew thy will, 'but did it not. I waited, until a world 'of uncertainty should satisfy my de-'sires; till thy providence should place 'me in such circumstances, as I vainly

'deemed

'deemed neceſſary to work out my ſal-
'vation. Lo, I have been cut off in
'the middſt of my fooliſhneſs, and now
'ſtand before thy tremendous judg-
'ment-ſeat, to render an account of the
'years I have waſted, and the bleſſings
'I have abuſed.' Merciful God! can we reflect without horrour on this ſituation of a ſelf-condemned ſinner? And what muſt be our feelings, when we reflect that a day, an hour, may place us in this dreadful ſituation?

But let us not inſiſt on the precarioufneſs of our preſent ſtate, ſo well known, ſo commonly obſerved; and ſo reluctantly remembered or attended to. Let us ſuppoſe, how unreaſonably ſoever, that the time we wantonly laviſh were really in our power; that we ſhall certainly arrive at that period on which our hopes are fixed; that the things we purſue are really valuable, and certainly to be obtained; that this world can ſa-

tisfy the heart of man, and that no new desires are ever ready to start up, and to distract him. The time is then come, when there is no pretence for delay. We have at length full leisure to live conformably to the dictates of religion. But is this in our power whenever we may be pleased to attempt it? Can we say to this passion, "*Go, and it goeth?*" to this affection, "*Come, and it cometh?*" Can we at once subdue those propensities, which have so long enslaved us; or burst the bands of those habits, which for years have held us fast in despite of reason and reflection? Is our whole internal frame to be new formed at pleasure? Is the science of a religious life to be acquired in a moment? or the gracious-assisting spirit promised at any time to the indolent and obstinate. The man who once suffers this world and its enjoyments to possess him; hath been originally too indifferent to the interests of

of eternity. This indifference encreaſes with the progreſs of his life. Like other vitious habits, it becomes inveterate. Should religious objects be preſented to his mind, they are received, firſt, with cold reſpect, and fruitleſs or affected approbation; next, with diſtaſte; then, with impatience and averſion. Armed at length with ſome futile ſyſtem more indulgent to his purſuits, he openly bids defiance to the evangelic doctrine; and wrapt in worldly conſequence, reſts ſecurely and triumphantly in the ſeat of the ſcorner; 'till God appeareth, to execute his woe on the rebellious children, "*who take counſel, but not of him; who* "*cover with a covering but not of his* "*ſpirit, that they may add ſin to ſin.*"— Such is the danger of the irreſolute and worldly: and ſuch may be the end of that man who pleads his engagements, his avocations, and diſtractions, againſt the immediate performance of his chriſtian duties.

My brethren! would you know the means of avoiding this tremendous danger? Cultivate the principles, and let the vital ſpirit of Chriſtianity poſſeſs your hearts betimes. Even in this life it ſhall be your ſupport and guide. Conſider that whatever be our worldly condition, whether of youth, or manhood, or age, of proſperity or affliction, of greatneſs or obſcurity, in theſe we meet no obſtacles but of our own raiſing, no difficulties that we have not created; they are the occaſions and opportunities vouchſafed, to the working out our ſalvation. Would you know what is the proper time for engaging ſincerely in this momentous work? It is the preſent moment. "*Seek the Lord*" ſaith the Prophet, "*while he may be found, call ye* "*upon him while he is near.*" He is this moment, near; his long-ſuffering hath ſpared us; his patience ſtill pleadeth with us; his word is ſtill nigh unto us; his exhortations, his promiſes, his

threatenings

threatenings are ſtill ſounded in our ears. And if the preſent adminiſtration of God's word hath not been received with ſcorn or levity or indifference, we may, even now, feel his powerful influence in or hearts, exhorting, urging, commanding us to ſeek his face. And woe to that man by whom ſuch impreſſions are reſiſted! for "*his ſpirit ſhall* "*not always ſtrive with man.*"

Let not things of ſuch unutterable moment, then, be at once diſmiſſed, and loſt in thoſe worldly ſocieties to which you are returning. Let every hearer of this day examine his heart with ſincerity. 'I have lived ſo long in this world. 'How have my days paſſed? In acquir-'ing and confirming habits of Chriſtian 'virtue? Or in the indulgence of paſ-'ſion, and the purſuit of vanity? Shall 'God's long ſuffering bear with my 'frowardneſs for ever? It may yet lead 'me to ſalvation: or it may be now

'exhauſted.'

'exhausted.'—And is the glory purchased for us of so little value; is the tremendous weight of God's wrath so unaffecting, that we can lie down peaceably, in doubt and uncertainty on such a point? Awake, thou that sleepest in the lap of worldly pleasure. Arise, thou that art lulled to insensibility, by the cares and interests of this present life. Lift up thy heart to that glory which shall be revealed. Ask thy soul, what shall be thy condition, when the present frame of things shall melt with fervent heat; and all its concerns vanish like the fleeting vapour? Is it a small thing that thy hope in Gods mercies be firmly founded; or is the dreadful self condemnation of the sinner of but slight regard? Or, if our hearts condemn us, do we not know that "*God is greater* "*than our hearts?*" that the heinousness of our disobedience, however it may be palliated, and disguised, and concealed even

even from ourſelves, is "*open to him* "*with whom we have to do?*"

If we ſtill heſitate, if we be ſtill reluctant, the vanities of this world are at hand: they are ready to ſeduce us, and to countenance our abject deſertion of God's ſervice. But his righteous judgment yet awaits us. And at his awful judgment-ſeat we ſhall all ſtand, when the vanities of this world ſhall paſs away, leaving us to the ſtinging remembrance of our folly.

But if we would ſpeak peace to our ſouls, there is but one way.—Let us inſtantly undertake what it is madneſs to defer. Let us engage in God's ſervice with ſincerity and conſtancy. From this moment let us renew our covenant with him; let us fervently petition for his gracious aſſiſtance: let our purpoſes be effectual, and our promiſes fulfilled. Then may we be aſſured, that he who

hath

hath ſpared, will yet graciouſly accept us.

Theſe are the only terms on which acceptance is promiſed. God grant they may be duly weighed, and carefully fulfilled! that we may obey the invitation of our heavenly maſter without reluctance or delay, and finally receive the reward of our obedience, even the immortal crown of glory, which Chriſt hath purchaſed for us!

SERMON X.

Vital Spirit of Christianity, illustrated in its Influence on Prosperity and Adversity.

PART I.

PHILIPPIANS, chap. iv. verse 12.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need.

THERE is something particularly striking in this fulness of expression used by the Apostle. It marks a firm and perfect confidence in his own succours. He seems to turn his eyes again

and

and again on every trying and ſeducing circumſtance of human life: to riſe ſuperiour to them all; and in defiance of them all, to rejoice and triumph in his own ſecurity.

The church of Philippi, impreſſed with gratitude for the bleſſings of his miniſtry, had remembered him in his bonds, and purpoſed to ſupply his neceſſities. He declared his ſatisfaction in this their benevolent deſign, which, though ineffectual with reſpect to him, indicated a loving-kindneſs approved by man, and acceptable to God. As to himſelf, he had learned to ſupport all the various incidents of life, to endure all the diſtreſſes and difficulties attendant on his miniſtry, to encounter the temptations of every kind to which he might be expoſed, to accommodate himſelf to every ſtate in which providence might place him; and in every ſtate to be content. "*Every where, and in all*

"*things,*

" *things, he was instructed both to be full*
" *and to be hungry, both to abound and to*
" *suffer need.*"

But in order to exhibit this sentiment of the Apostle in its full strength and energy, we may pertinently recur to the strict and original meaning of the words, " *I am instructed.*"—The phrase thus rendered is like some other expressions used by Saint Paul, borrowed from the religion of the gentile world; and signifies immediately and properly, 'I have 'been initiated.' That is, I am as a person introduced by the Gentiles into those of their secret rites and doctrines, from which the generality of mankind are excluded, and which are supposed to have particular influence on men's future conduct.

By this similitude he describes his admission into the great mystery of godliness, and its blessed effects. Enlightened,

lightened, ſtrengthened and exalted by its doctrines and ſpiritual ſuccours, he exults in his ſecurity. The blandiſhments of proſperity, and the rigours of diſtreſs, are equally ineffectual to ſubdue him: for he is a Chriſtian: and therefore prepared for all the changes of this mortal ſtate; and whatever dangers may aſſail him, armed compleatly for the encounter.

MARK then, my brethren, that bleſſed ſource whence all this firmneſs and ſelf-poſſeſſion are derived. And, if happily I may perſuade you to draw from the ſame "*fountain of living waters*," I ſhall endeavour to explain the influence of that vital ſpirit of chriſtianity which Saint Paul imbibed, not only in regulating our deſires, but directing our conduct in the ſeveral conditions of human life. Thus ſhall we diſcern one great advantage of our vocation; and thus, I truſt, we ſhall be perſuaded to cultivate

thoſe divine principles, which alone can ſecure our preſent, as well as future happineſs.

And firſt, I am in general to remind you, that it is the ſpirit of our religion only which places every object of this world in its true point of view, and enables us to behold them all without tranſport or violence of paſſion, unreaſonable admiration or childiſh fear. It poſſeſſeth us with a juſt indifference to tranſitory things, founded on a lively conviction, that we are "*ſtrangers and* "*pilgrims upon earth.*" It elevates our thoughts beyond the moſt ſplendid intereſts of mortality. It teacheth us to aſpire to ſomething tranſcendently ſuperiour to worldly greatneſs, and infinitely more tranſporting than worldly pleaſure: not ſeducing us to any gloomy retreat, any rigorous ſecluſion from the buſineſs and duties of humanity; but training us, by an heavenly diſcipline,

to

to ſupport the various conditions in which providence may place us, to act in each with propriety and dignity, and to make every advantage and every difficulty, every gift of providence, and every chaſtiſement of a gracious parent, proſperity and calamity, diſtinction and obſcurity, every ſtate and circumſtance of mortality, all equally ſubſervient to our real and proper happineſs.

But from ſuch general obſervations, we muſt proceed to conſider the ſubject now before us more particularly.

The two moſt dangerous ſituations in which a frail creature can be placed, are thoſe deſcribed in the text, the ſtates of abundance and of need. In theſe, as we are moſt powerfully aſſailed, and moſt eaſily ſubdued, we have occaſion for every ſalutary direction, and every ſpiritual ſuccour. Let us then conſider, in the firſt place, how we are inſtructed

by

by our religion, "*to be full, and to* "*abound.*"

'And have we indeed occaſion to be 'inſtructed in a part ſo eaſy and agree-'able? What is further neceſſary than 'to receive and to enjoy theſe advan-'tages?'—Yet ſurely the true enjoyment of them is not ſo very eaſy. Caſt your eyes round you to the ſenſual and libertine. See with what afflicting toil and wearineſs they torture their invention to ſupply new means of gratification; how they waſte their ſtrength, and diſſipate God's gifts, in an unſatisfied purſuit of pleaſure, ſtill diſappointed, yet ſtill protracted. Turn to the man of elegance and refinement, who maketh all things ſuperb and exquiſitely ornamented his portion in this life: ye find him ſoon ſated, if not diſguſted, by his purſuits, painfully conſcious that his trifles have miſerably repaid him, and that he is degraded as well as diſappointed.

pointed. Consider the ambitious and aspiring; the toil and anguish of their days: the selfish and worldly minded; their unreasonable anxieties and corroding cares. The vexations and disappointments, the weariness and dissatisfaction, the repining, the fretfulness and restlessness of such men shew, but too plainly, that they have not yet learned to enjoy their good things.

Behold then! we offer them an excellent instructor. When the principles of our holy religion have been entertained, cultivated and suffered to gain full possession of the heart, then, and then only, do they come prepared to fill that advantageous station, in which God hath placed them.

For, in the first place, our religion teacheth us to proportion our regard for present things to their real and intrinsic value. He who knows that he is made

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for a purpoſe more exalted than that of any worldly enjoyment: he who looks up through all the periſhable objects of mortality, even to the glories of an eternal exiſtence, muſt know and feel the comparative inſignificance of preſent things: And thus, while he derives every real advantage from abundance, is not betrayed by groundleſs confidence into thoſe perpetual vexations and diſappointments experienced by the man who ſetteth his heart on riches. Even Gentile wiſdom could diſcover the fleeting and precarious nature of ſuch things, and declaim on the indifference and ſerenity with which they ſhould be accepted or reſigned. But the wiſdom of Chriſt Jeſus is much more enlarged, as well as more comfortable. It teacheth, that fleeting and precarious as they may be, it is in our power to ſtamp a real value on them, by making them ſubſervient to ſuch purpoſes as ſhall retain an ineſtimable importance, when all the

little interests of mortality have vanished: that for this they were entrusted; that they should be thankfully received, and chearfully applied to the just and benevolent discharge of our respective duties.

HEREIN is the real enjoyment of this world; that the faithful steward of God's bounty can say to his soul, 'I praise 'the divine goodness for what it hath 'vouchsafed. I enjoy it with a tempe-'rate and well regulated mind. I press 'forward to something greater and more 'valuable than any worldly blessings. 'These then cannot captivate or sub-'due me. Yet, while they remain, let 'me apply them in such a manner as 'may convert them to real blessings!'

NOR is the spirit of christianity less powerful in subduing that insolence and pride which abundance naturally creates. Indulge these passions, and they prove a per-

a perpetual torment. They magnify our consequence to mortify us, and create offences to provoke us. But this state of perpetual irritation hath no place where the mind is duly tempered by humility. When we have learned of him who was "*meek and lowly of* "*heart*," then it is we find rest for our souls; then we enjoy our good things, without afflicting our own hearts, or rendering ourselves contemptible or disgusting to those around us.

"*When the rich man speaketh*," saith the son of Sirach "*every man holdeth* "*his tongue, and lo, what he saith is* "*extolled to the clouds.*" Inferiours receive him with submission; friends surround and bow before him; respect and deference attend upon his steps; the homage of dependence points out his greatness; the obsequiousness of flattery exalts his self-satisfaction. But to correct their intoxicating influence, he is

thus warned by religion. 'Truſt not to 'this dazzling exteriour. Think on thy 'real weakneſs and unworthineſs. Or 'if thou be not weak and unworthy, 'give thy endowments the adorning of 'humility. So ſhalt thou find favour 'not merely with the intereſted; thou 'ſhalt enjoy thy pre-eminence with real 'grace and dignity. Man ſhall reve-'rence; and God will accept thee.'

And need we mention the influence of religion in allaying that feveriſh thirſt of pleaſure created by abundance, oftentimes to the deſtruction of the poſſeſſor? He rejoiceth in the means of indulging every appetite. He ruſheth forward in the alluring courſe, until wearineſs, and pain, and diſtaſte weigh down his powers; until nature proves unequal to his appetites, and his appetites, impatient of diſappointment, harraſs his languid and exhauſted nature. Alas! he finds, though late, that to enjoy the

good

good things of life, it was neceſſary to moderate ad controul his deſires, and to preſerve both mind and body in unimpaired vigour. And this is the more "*excellent way*" which the goſpel ſheweth; that divine guide and counſellor, which teacheth him to ſubdue the violence of his animal nature, corrects his falſe and ſordid conceptions, forms him to a juſt reliſh of objects ſuited to his dignity, and leads him to the true enjoyments of a reaſonable and a redeemed creature. Far from inculcating any inſolent contempt of worldly advantages, it directs him to purſue and to apply them. But it attends him, in the purſuit to regulate and moderate his deſires. It ſaith to his ſwelling paſſions, "*hitherto* "*ſhall ye go, and no further.*" It baniſhes all diſtractions and anxieties, and fills him with that ſerenity and complacency, which give grace and value to all that he poſſeſſes.—Such is the bleſſed influence of that religion, which the

great

great and affluent are oftentimes ſolicitous to drive far from them, as a gloomy intruder on their enjoyments.

But let them obſtinately ſhut their ears againſt the admonitions of the Goſpel; let them confine their affections to worldly objects; purſue them inſatiably; triumph in their ſucceſs; indulge freely in every thing that abundance can beſtow. For ſurely that man's preſent ſtate is happy, whoſe favourite paſſions are fully gratified: who can ſay to his ſoul, "*thou* "*haſt much goods laid up for many years*; "*take thine eaſe, eat, drink and be mer-* "*ry.*" Yet ſuch happy men would tell you, were they to ſpeak the real dictates of their hearts, that eaſe and chearfulneſs are ſtrangers to their wretched ſouls; that they are diſappointed, mortified, diſguſted, reſtleſs, wearied, gloomy, languid, and impatient of a life worn out by falſe hopes, and fruitleſs purſuits. Such happy men have been known to find

find existence intolerable, and to have rushed into eternity by desperate self-murder. To what shall we attribute such melancholy frenzy? To a wounded conscience, perhaps, which even in the fulness of worldly prosperity cannot support its secret tortures. But are the consciences of the worldly-minded so very sensible? When, by long habits of corrupt and mean desires, God is no longer in all their thoughts, are they so feelingly impressed with his displeasure? No! such dreadful conclusions of a life of vanity, arise more frequently from the disappointments of ambition, from the pangs of mortified pride, from an heart untutored by the gospel-precepts, from an understanding contracted and debased, from a fruitless search of happiness in the objects of mortality, from an impatience of disappointment, from the madness and desperation of passions at once unsatisfied and unsubdued. Even such hath been the consequence of re-

nouncing

nouncing that guide, which teacheth us moderation and meekneſs, and benevolence, which regulates and refines our ſentiments, and raiſes our affections far beyond the meanneſs and precarioufneſs of this mortal ſtate.

SERMON X.

Vital Spirit of Christianity: illustrated in its Influence on Prosperity and Adversity.

PART II.

PHILLIPPIANS, chap. iv. verse 12.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

BUT however we may be instructed by our Lord's doctrine to enjoy the good things of life, man hath oftentimes a more grievous part to support. The brilliant advantages of this world are granted but to a few; and these find their

their condition frequently embittered. To the mourner and the afflicted we are to addreſs our comfort and direction. And need we many words to explain, how we are taught by our religion, to "*be hungry and to ſuffer need:*" how it inſtructs and enables us to ſupport the various evils of mortality?

It opens a tranſporting ſcene of conſolation, to brighten all our melancholy, and reconcile us to all preſent ſeverities. It comes with healing in its wings, and wipes away all tears, by the aſſurance, that "*our*" light affliction which is "*but* "*for a moment, worketh for us a far more* "*exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" Ranſack all the ſtores of heathen wiſdom, and you diſcover the futility of thoſe conſolations which their ſages offer to ſooth the anguiſh of diſtreſs. We may be told that pain is not an evil; as if a ſenſeleſs and affected word could ſilence the complaints of a ſuffering creature.

ture. It may be ſaid, that pain if protracted muſt be light and tolerable; a ſuggeſtion falſe and futile: that if intenſe, it muſt be ſhort, and end in the inſenſibility of the grave. And could we ſuſpect the aſſertion to be true, we muſt ſhudder at the hideous conſolation. But when we ſeek the ſource of true wiſdom, we find our hearts ſtrengthened, ſupported, and enlivened. The Chriſtian knows that what we call diſtreſſes are their own conſolation; that they are inflicted not in wrath but mercy; for our correction and improvement; to eſtrange us from the periſhable objects of mortality; to approve our patience, and meekneſs, and reſignation and fortitude; to render us more acceptable in the ſight of God; and thus to work for us that abundant happineſs, reſerved for thoſe who are accepted in his ſight.

'I AM not heir', ſaith the deſpiſed follower of Chriſt Jeſus 'to tranſient and

'precarious

'precarious riches. But I am heir of an 'inheritance incorruptible in the hea-'vens. It was purchaſed, it is prepared 'and reſerved for me.—I am deſtitute 'of all worldly comfort,' ſaith the Chriſtian mourner. 'But I have my 'ſure and ſolid comfort.' "*I know that* "*my Redeemer liveth.*" 'I behold him 'with the ſteady eye of faith: and in 'my affliction I feel the healing influ-'ence of his ſpirit. To fleſh and blood 'my pilgrimage is painful: but the day 'is at hand when there ſhall be no more 'pain: when this feeble periſhable body 'ſhall burſt the bands of mortality, and 'be renewed in ſtrength and ſtability, 'and glory.'

THUS are we enabled to ſupport our evils; "*troubled*", perhaps, "*on every* "*ſide, yet not diſtreſſed; perplexed but not* "*in deſpair; perſecuted, but not forſaken;* "*caſt down, but not deſtroyed;—while* "*we look not at the things which are* "*ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen.*"

BUT

But the gospel teacheth us yet further to prevent the numerous vexations which arise from erroneous conceptions and irregular desires. The child of this world, whom providence hath placed in lowliness and obscurity, is sometimes confounded by the splendid exteriour of those above him. He conceives that station, titles, opulence, sumptuousness and pomp, are in themselves blessings, and that the possessors, however unworthy they may appear, are yet distinguished favourites of providence. He laments the severity of his own lot. He cannot freely indulge his pride, his sloth, or sensuality. He may have his enjoyment of health, competence, and social comfort. But he hath not the enjoyments of other men. His subsistence is earned by toil; they are fed to the full, in ease and indolence. They rest in gorgeous palaces; he labours in his humble cottage. Thus he yields to the fatal

fatal deception of appearances: his ſoul rankles with envy and repining, and thus he proves his own ſevere tormentor.

But the Chriſtian is happily freed from all his bitterneſs. He knows that neither the dignity nor the happineſs of a creature deſtined to immortality is to be eſtimated by the accidental diſtinctions or apparent advantages of this life; that the poſſeſſors of theſe are equally obnoxious to the evils of humanity with the lowlieſt of their fellow-creatures; that every thing of moment to our real and intrinſic happineſs, is diſtributed by Providence to all, with equal and impartial goodneſs. Impreſſed with ſuch comfortable convictions, he enjoys his preſent portion, with a complacency more valuable than all the riotous exultation of the ſplendid and affluent. As his mind is not ſoftened and enervated, he encounters his difficulties

culties with firmneſs. As his heart is not captivated by the good things of life, he feels no torment when they are denied him. And as he ſeeks no happineſs from gratifying any vitious paſſion, he knows not the anguiſh of unſatisfied deſires, and appetites never to be indulged.

The ſting of worldly calamity, like that of death, is ſin. It is the wounded ſpirit which cannot ſuſtain itſelf, much leſs the afflictions of mortality. When the wretched creature hath forſaken the guidance of religion, is ſinking under the weight of calamity of his own creating, with no reſource from without, no comfort from within—what ſtate can be more deſperate? If he turns to the world, the world diſclaims him. If he ſeeks relief in his own breaſt, he there finds the afflicting conſciouſneſs of guilt, and bitter ſenſe of miſery the conſequence of guilt. Yet even in this

miſerable

miſerable condition of the creature, he is diſpoſed and prompted to ſeek the remedy of all his ſorrows. He who is forſaken and caſt down, naturally reſorts to the friend of the friendleſs. And let him once reſume the ſuccours of religion; let him return to the true ſource of comfort; then will he ſupport the moſt grievous of calamities, that which is embittered by conſcious guilt. But to ſupport it is a ſmall thing. He will rejoice and be exceeding glad, that he is recalled from the paths of perdition; that he hath his advocate and propitiation; that in the midſt of worldly ſorrow, his redemption is nigh, neither will his ſalvation tarry.

But affliction and diſtreſs are ſometimes brought with all their weight and bitterneſs, upon the ſons of men, not from their own, but the ſins of others. Pride, oppreſſion, and injuſtice, fall with unfeeling cruelty upon them, and tram-

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ple them in the duſt. And when the child of this world feels the fury of the oppreſſor, or is deſpoiled by fraud and circumvention, every irritable paſſion is inflamed. The wildneſs of wrath, the frenzy of revenge, the rancour of determined hatred, tear and torment him. How then ſhall he expel that infernal Legion which hath poſſeſſed him, and left no reſpite from torture and diſtraction? Let him fly to that Saviour, whoſe word ſuch Spirits muſt obey. Let him learn of him who was meek and lowly of heart, and he ſhall find reſt for his wretched ſoul.

Our religion doth not teach him to court injuries, or to yield, in every caſe, with an abject and ſlaviſh ſubmiſſion to the oppreſſor. He is not, by his chriſtian profeſſion, to relinquiſh the deareſt rights of man, or to renounce that protection which the laws of ſociety hold out to every unoffending ſubject. But

he is taught not to "*resist evil*," not to oppose the wicked and injurious by the same weapons of injustice, fraud and oppression by which he is assailed; not repaying injury by injury, or as Saint Paul expresses it, "*rendering evil* "*for evil*." In cases of slighter and more tolerable wrongs he is taught to suppress the first emotions of resentment, and to check the violence of that pride which clamours for revenge: to endure, and even to hazard a repetition of injury, rather than indulge those sudden transports of passion, which are equally enemies to our innocence and peace: and in every case, and in every trial, to preserve the serenity of a christian temper; forbearing and forgiving, and suffering no wrongs, no virulence whatever to extinguish the sacred flame of christian charity.—If these be deemed hard sayings, let them be duly weighed, and their present tendency considered. They alleviate the pains of calamity, they

they deaden the pangs of affliction: and give us a dominion over those things which seem least in our power to command. They cannot direct the course of worldly events, but they determine the impression these shall make upon us. They cannot avert the storm of calamity; but they give strength to support its utmost violence: and when the severest worldly affliction presses most forcibly upon us, the meekness and patience of our profession, and the steadfast hope of our calling, enable us to cry out in triumph, "*where is thy* "*sting?*" and "*where is thy vic-* "*tory?*"

Let not then the prosperous glory in their abundance: let not the wretched sink under their visitations. Let them know and feel that truth I have laboured to inculcate, that it is the might of our religion only which can sustain us, and the wisdom of Christ Jesus which

can direct us, through all the perils and trials to which every state of humanity is exposed.

And now, my brethren, let us examine our own hearts. God grant we may not there find various passions enemies to our peace? Have not our good things deceived us? Have not our misfortunes been felt in their full severity? Whence is it that we are dissatisfied, afflicted and tormented? Comes it not even from hence, that we have not been duly possessed with the true vital spirit of our religion? For it is not the formality of an external profession that can give us peace in this world, or happiness in the next. Cultivate that blessed principle, which, by God's gracious assistance, shall be our guide and comfort. Infix it deeply in your hearts, and in every danger ye shall find your sure resource. In the day of joy, in the hour of mourning, in wealth, in tribu-

tribulation, in diſappointment, in ſucceſs, let us ſet God always before us: then may we be aſſured that he is our ſtrength and refuge, and that his ſpirit ſhall conduct us through this fleeting period to the manſions of immortality; where trials and conflicts and temptations ſhall be no more: where all the variety of worldly conditions ſhall be done away; and the full and the hungry, the abaſed and the abounding, ſhall all ſit down together in the kingdom of the Father, heirs of the ſame ſalvation, and partakers of the ſame immortal happineſs, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

SERMON XI.

The Advantages afforded by the Examples of the Faithful; and the Motives for imitating them.

Preached at St. Anne's, Dublin.

Hebrews, chap. xiii. part of ver. 7, 8.

——*Whose Faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

THE persons immediately pointed out by the Apostle, were the rulers and pastors of that particular church to which his epistle is addressed. But at this day, the precept may be taken more exten-

extenſively. We are called to be followers of thoſe in every place and period, who have run their courſe, and obtained their prize; yea, "*the great* "*multitude which no man could number*, "*of all nations and kindreds, and peo-* "*ple, and tongues*," deſcribed by Saint John, ſtanding "*before the throne, and* "*before the Lamb, cloathed in white* "*robes*," the garb of purity and glory; "*and palms in their hands*," the emblem of victory, and "*with a loud voice* "*ſaying, Salvation unto our God, which* "*ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the* "*Lamb*."

It is this glorious company of Apoſtles, Prophets, Martyrs, Confeſſors, and "*ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*," whoſe courage and perſeverance in their earthly warfare, we are taught to bear in mind, that our reſolution may be ſtrengthened by ſuch illuſtrious patterns, and our hope enlivened by reflecting on their recom-

recompenſe of reward. For this purpoſe the early converts to Chriſtianity viſited the tombs of the Martyrs, and ſolemnized the memory of their ſufferings: thus confirming their own reſolutions, of following them in the way to everlaſting glory, through perſecutions and ſufferings and death. Their's were no ſuperſtitious pilgrimages: they were not amuſed by lying wonders: they paid no adoration to the creature whoſe mortal remains were depoſited before them. Nor was their purpoſe merely to honour the dead, but to inſtruct the living, to encourage them to "*fight the good fight*;" and to animate and enliven them, by the remembrance of thoſe who had finiſhed their warfare, and were more than conquerours.

But before I proceed more particularly to the ſubject now to be conſidered, it will be proper to take ſome notice

notice of the expreſſions in which the precept of the Apoſtle is conveyed.

What we are particularly directed to follow, is the faith of thoſe who have gone before us. And by faith we are to underſtand, that firm and lively conviction of the truth of God's word, and ſteadfaſt reliance on his promiſes, which, by the aſſiſtance of divine grace, penetrates the ſoul of man, regulates his affections, influences his conduct, and preſerves him blameleſs and harmleſs in the midſt of temptation, vigorous and perſevering in the race that is ſet before him.—By "*the end of their converſa-*" *tion*," which we are to conſider, nothing leſs is meant than the glorious iſſue and reſult of their patient continuance in well-doing; and that harbour of peace and joy in which they are happily received, by ſteering their courſe ſucceſsfully through the ſtorms and perils of this life.—And when the admonition

nition of the Apoſtle is immediately ſucceeded by a ſolemn declaration, that Chriſt is "*the ſame yeſterday, and to-day,* "*and for ever,*" we naturally look on both as ſtrictly connected, and are led to conſider the whole paſſage as containing the precept, and the motive or reaſon for our obſervance of it.

I SHALL, therefore, firſt endeavour to explain the advantages of ſetting before us the moſt eminent examples of the Faithful, who are departed in the Lord; and ſecondly, to enquire into the motives and encouragements to follow ſuch examples, derived from the immutability of the great author and rewarder of our faith.

I. AND firſt, it may be obſerved of example in general, that it is a conciliating, and therefore an effectual mode of inſtruction and perſuaſion. How powerful it is, and how prevailing, even when

when our consciences reclaim against its enticements, let those bear witness who live in the midst of a perverse generation. How it refines and elevates, directs and encourages, works on our shame, our emulation, prompts us to provide things honest in the sight of those we consort with, to adopt their sentiments, to esteem what they esteem, and to practise what they pursue; all this is happily experienced by the companions of those who fear God. Were our situation so untoward that such characters should be seldom found in our borders, or that their light should not shine before us with sufficient lustre; or that it should be dimmed and clouded by the imperfections of humanity, still we have our effectual resource. Open the volume of eternal life, and there converse with the venerable, the exalted, and the amiable. Attend out blessed Lord, who lived for our example, through the whole progress of his

bene-

benevolence and compassion, his meekness, patience, and resignation. Converse with the Patriarchs and Prophets of old time. Be witnesses of the faith of Abraham, of the patient integrity of Job, of the steadfast confidence of him "*who refused to be called the son of* "*Pharaoh's daughter, chusing rather to* "*suffer affliction with the people of God,* "*than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a* "*season.*" Accompany the royal Prophet in the bitterness of his contrition, the reverence of his adoration, his exalted sense of mercies, and his transporting strains of praise. Attend the blessed Apostles from one kingdom to another people, "*in journeyings, in wea-* "*riness, in faintings, in fastings;*" constant and courageous, in publishing the glad tidings of the gospel, "*through evil* "*report and good report, as deceivers and* "*yet true, as persecuted, but not for-* "*saken, as cast down but not destroyed.*"

But

But the time would fail me, were I to recount all those instances of illustrious piety and virtue displayed in the holy scriptures; or even to select the more distinguished from that innumerable host of the departed, who "*wrought righteousness, and obtained the* "*promises*;" who laboured faithfully, and rest from their labours.

Our Lord, indeed, was the great and singular example of unsinning obedience. But creatures, such as we are, must not confine our attention to his consummate purity and perfection. In him we have no example of a violent temptation to sin resisted and subdued; of an outrageous passion suddenly restrained; of wrath calmed and fury disarmed; of the duties consequent on actual transgression, remorse, repentance, and zealous amendment. In such particulars we are to be instructed by men of like passions and frailties with ourselves.

ſelves. And they teach us how our feebleneſs is to be ſupported, our lapſes to be recovered, and our progreſs moſt effectually advanced.

Our indolence ſometimes tempts us to conceive that the ſcheme of chriſtian conduct preſcribed by the Goſpel is ideal. We acknowledge the excellence of the commandment, but ſpeak peace to our omiſſions and defects, by aſking, "*who is ſufficient for theſe things?*" But be not deceived. The lives of all the great and good and pious that have gone before us, declare loudly, that every creature who hath received the word, is enabled by God's grace to ſeek him diligently and effectually. They invite us to "*walk by the ſame rule, and* "*to mind the ſame things:*" for thus have they walked, and thus have they attained.—You ſay, theſe are glorious models, but like the precepts they would enforce, too glorious and exalted for our weak-

weakneſs. They were holy men: we are frail and corrupt.—Yet theſe holy men were of the ſame nature with ourſelves, had the ſame propenſities to ſin, the ſame paſſions, and frequently their trials and temptations were more afflicting than our own. But they watched over their propenſities, they ſubdued their paſſions, and by looking ſteadily to "*the recompence of reward*," encountered their trials with ſucceſs, and conquered their temptations. Their lives then bear teſtimony againſt our weakneſs and perverſeneſs. They are a direct proof, that the divine grace is ſufficient for us, that God doth not ſuffer us to be tempted about that we are able; that as we are aſſiſted and directed, it depends on us, and from us it is juſtly required, to "*lay aſide every* "*weight, and to run with patience the* "*race that is ſet before us*:" for thouſands have run before us, and ten thouſands have finiſhed their courſe with joy.

But

But, perhaps, I addreſs myſelf to thoſe, who live in the midſt of perverſeneſs and depravity; who on every ſide are ſurrounded by the light, the careleſs and the worldly-minded, borne down by the torrent of faſhion and opinion, expoſed to the contempt and ſcorn of the libertine, dreading to be diſtinguiſhed, and ſhrinking from the imputation of ſingularity. In ſuch circumſtances, above all others, it is incumbent on us to extend our views; for we are not called merely not to be the worſt among the blind and corrupt. We are to look to the redeemed of all nations, to the aſſembly of the bleſſed that ſurround the throne of God: to whom we are to conform, and with whom we are to be united: and if there be honour ſurely it muſt be found in ſuch a union; and if there be praiſe, ſurely it muſt be that of following their ſteps. If we duly conſider that a ſhort day of faithfulneſs and perſeverance ſhall give us an inheritance

for ever with the faithful and perſevering, little can we be affected by the herd of ſordid and corrupted creatures that now ſurround us. Is their praiſe to be compared with the acclamations of the bleſſed; or their ſcorn piercing, whom the all-wiſe and glorious hath laughed to ſcorn? Are we ſingular when we detach ourſelves from thoſe, who have detached themſelves from every thing good and glorious in God's creation? Or do we want the countenance of numbers, when the innumerable hoſts of the bleſſed call with one voice upon us, to be "*ſteadfaſt, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know*" by their examples "*that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.*"

Men who would excel in works of genius are directed to ſet before them all the diſtinguiſhed and renowned in ſuch works; to conſider what abilities they would have diſplayed, and how admirably

mirably they would have conducted the design, in which their successors are engaged. The direction is of infinitely greater consequence to those who are engaged in the work of salvation. How would the saint and the servant of the most High despise such a worldly allurement? With what courage would such a temptation be resisted? with what caution would such a passion be suppressed? with what fortitude would such a calamity be sustained, by one of those illustrious characters displayed in the holy scriptures?—These are the questions to be addressed to our hearts, instead of our being afraid to excel those immediately around us; or of pressing on before them in the way of everlasting life.

II. But the great encouragement to our following the faithful, as well as the great enforcement of this our duty, is still to be considered. I mean the immutability of the Great Author of our

faith, "*Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday* "*and to day, and for ever!*" to all of every period and condition, the same teacher, master, and gracious saviour.

We are apt to form some confused notion, that these holy men, by whose example we are taught to walk, were more highly favoured than ourselves, and had more advantages vouchsafed to them, than to any ordinary christian of this day. But herein we reason not aright. Many of them indeed had preternatural endowments, such as their ministry required. And if these be necessary for the working out of man's salvation, undoubtedly they were more favoured than ourselves. But it is not the working of miracles, or gift of tongues, or discerning of spirits, which our Lord accepts as the conditions of his promised mercy. Nay we are assured that many who have enjoyed such endowments for the salvation of others,

ſhall themſelves be finally rejected. But in every thing eſſential to ſalvation we have a Saviour equally gracious to us all, as to the moſt enlightened and diſtinguiſhed of his followers.

He hath vouchſafed to us all the ſame foundation of our faith, and the ſame ſolid ground of conviction. They who converſed with our Lord or his immediate followers had their ſenſes indeed more powerfully impreſſed. Yet even ſuch impreſſions did not always prove irreſiſtible. And there is a peculiar bleſſing pronounced on thoſe who not ſeeing, do yet believe; who enquire candidly and aſſent ingenuouſly, without prejudice or cavil: though not indulged with that particular kind of evidence which ignorance and preſumption might affect to require. And the means of rational conviction are granted to us all. Its original foundation once firmly laid, remains impregnable; and truth, like its

great

great author, is the ſame, in antient times, in latter days, and through all ſucceeding periods. It knows no decay, ſuffers no diminution; but is rather that ſhining light, which ſhineth more and more, unto the perfect day, when faith ſhall be loſt in enjoyment.

And as our means of rational conviction are the ſame, ſo have we the ſame divine aſſiſtance to render our faith lively, fruitful, and effectual: the ſame promiſe of the ſpirit, in every operation neceſſary for this purpoſe. It is not only to ſome more highly favoured that this promiſe is vouchſafed; but to all "*who are afar off*." It is not only in them, but in us, that God ſtill worketh, "*both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.*"

We have alſo, the ſame motives to obedience revealed to us. The glories of an eternal exiſtence are ſtill diſplayed

before

before us: the terrours of divine wrath are ſtill ſounded in our ears. The moſt enlightened of all the race of mortals had no ſtronger aſſurance that God ſhall judge the world in righteouſneſs, than we. Nay many Patriarchs and holy men of old would have rejoiced, had they received that revelation of life and immortality which the lowlieſt of our religious aſſembly now enjoys.

Say not then, that theſe illuſtrious examples, whoſe faith we are commanded to follow, lived in happier days; that many of them converſed immediately with their heavenly maſter; heard his doctrines, and were pierced with his affectionate exhortations. For herein, the goodneſs of our bleſſed Lord appears unalterably the ſame. In the holy ſcriptures, we have the fulneſs of his inſtruction ſtill conveyed us, his affection ſtill expreſſed, his ſolicitude for our ſalvation manifeſted without abatement. We ſtill

converſe

converſe with him; we are enlightened by his precepts, and comforted by his promiſes.

We may even ſuppoſe, for on ſuch a ſuppoſition the immutability of our bleſſed Lord is ſtill manifeſt, that his immediate followers had more aſſiſtance, and a greater portion of God's ſpirit, than any ordinary chriſtian now enjoys. But if ſo, their trials alſo were proportionably greater. We are not called to "*labours more abundant*," nor expoſed to perſecutions, and ſufferings and death for the goſpel's ſake. We have no ſeverities to ſupport. The terrours of the wicked are not thundered in our ears; the powers of the enemy are not armed againſt us. We are protected and ſecure. We have no adverſaries without: Within, we have to fear only from our own indolence and corruption;

Nothing

NOTHING indeed can be more mortifying and alarming, than to consider, what advantages we have received, and what is their influence upon our hearts. We are called to immortality, yet enslaved by the things of this life: sometimes feebly tottering in the christian race; sometimes deviating into the paths of corruption. Invited by the whole assembly of God's glorious creatures, to tread in their steps, and to share in their reward; yet seduced by a few contemptible slaves of iniquity to be conformed to their vileness. Was it for this that the great mystery of godliness was revealed? That our Lord descended from his glory, and assumed our nature? that he died and rose for our salvation? Surely the stupendous work of man's redemption was for a nobler purpose, than that of giving us a lifeless and imperfect sense of duty, a coldness and indifference to the hope of our calling: or a formal and decently composed exteriour,

teriour, a languor or diſtraction in the hour of devotion, with minds hardly and ſcarcely collected for a moment, and inſtantly reſigned again to the world and its alluring objects. No, my brethren, the communion of a Chriſtian is not with this world and its allurements. His heart is lifted up to ſomething infinitely more exalted. He is a fellow-citizen with all the moſt illuſtrious in Chriſt's univerſal kingdom. To them is he to conform, if he would be partaker of their reward.

Let us then turn away from the examples of folly and wretchedneſs, that obtrude themſelves, to ſeduce and corrupt us. Our converſation is not with theſe. Let us fix ſteadily on thoſe with whom it is our duty and our happineſs to be conformed: who will direct and animate us in our progreſs to immortal glory. For we and they alike, have the ſame

ſame rule, the ſame courſe, the ſame aſſiſtance, and the ſame prize.

God grant! that by duly conſidering that weight of glory which ſhall be revealed, and faithfully labouring to obtain it, we may have the end of our converſation in heaven, and there unite with thoſe bleſſed ſpirits whoſe faith we follow, in everlaſting joy, and never-ceaſing praiſes to the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords!

SERMON XII.

The Power of God in the Encreaſe and Eſtabliſhmant of the Goſpel; with an Examination of the natural Cauſes aſſigned for its Progreſs.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN, *on the Feaſt of the Epiphany, and the following Sunday.*

PART I.

ISAIAH, chap. lx. verſe 22.

A little one ſhall become a thouſand; and a ſmall one a ſtrong nation: I the Lord will haſten it in his time.

WITH theſe words the prophet cloſes a magnificent deſcription of the glory of Chriſt's church, when the glad tidings

tidings of peace were to be proclaimed to the nations of the earth; when "*the* "*Gentiles were to come to the light*" of the gospel, and "*kings to the brightness* "*of its rising.*"

The text which closes the chapter, and is indeed the sum of the whole sublime passage, hath these two particulars expressed in all the elevation and solemnity by which this prophet is distinguished. First, that the gospel when manifested to the world, should be attended with such success, and spread with such a swift and extensive progress as would be infinitely disproportioned to its first beginnings. "*A little one shall* "*become a thousand, and a small one a* "*strong nation.*" And secondly, that this encrease should not be produced by human agency; but that the immediate interposition of divine power should appear in it. "*I the Lord will* "*hasten it in his* [the Messiah's] *time.*"

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the time of the dispensation of his gospel, and the establishment of his kingdom.

This then is the subject which I propose to your consideration.—"*The "power of God, in the sudden and wonderful encrease, and victorious establishment of the gospel.*" This I shall endeavour to illustrate; and from thence deduce some observations which may tend to give the subject its due influence upon our minds.

My design then naturally leads me to consider the circumstances of the world, when our Lord sent forth his disciples to teach all nations. And first, as to the Jews: It is remarkable, that while God himself vouchsafed to be their king, and to administer his government by immediate revelations of his will, and extraordinary interpositions of his power, they were, notwithstanding, ever ready to

rebel,

rebel: not that they beheld the moſt ſtupendous miracles with indifference, but ſtrongly prejudiced in favour of thoſe idolatries from which they had been ſeparated, they could not entirely and at once root out their affection for them; but were willing to be perſuaded that they were not wholly to be abandoned, but might in ſome ſort be reconciled to the laws and ordinances of God. Yet after the captivity, when they were no longer favoured with extraordinary diſpenſations, they became remarkable for an obſtinate adherence to their law; their prejudices were then in favour of their own law, for the violation of which they had been ſo ſeverely puniſhed. But however ſtrong their attachment to the rituals, the moral part of their law was neglected: To judgment, juſtice, and mercy they were ſtrangers: nor doth their own hiſtorian impute the deſtruction which afterwards fell upon the whole nation, to any other cauſe but the divine

vine vengeance due to their abominable corruptions. Such were their circumstances, when the Messiah appeared. It is true, that at the time of his appearance, they were in expectation of his coming: but that appearance was so contrary to their imaginations, that they despised, persecuted, and at length put him to an ignominious death. Hence, the preaching his gospel to them was in effect proclaiming their obstinacy, ingratitude, and abominable impiety. And as it tended to overthrow all which they held sacred, as it pronounced their ordinances, (those ordinances on which alone they depended for acceptance) to be no longer pleasing to God; what could be more calculated to excite their utmost fury? And it did excite their utmost fury, and withstand their most inveterate malice.

But great as the obstacles were to the preaching of the gospel to the Jews,

yet ſome foundation there was on which to proceed. The doctrines of the Fall, and of the promiſed ſeed were familiar to them. The chriſtians acknowledged the divine origin of their religious conſtitution, and appealed to their own prophets. But as to the Gentiles, they were utter ſtrangers to all theſe things. To comprehend the doctrine propoſed to them, they were previouſly to be informed of many truths quite remote from their conceptions: they were to be acquainted with the hiſtory of a people whom they held in abhorrence and contempt, and which, of conſequence, was not likely to engage their attention; and when in ſpight of ſuch obſtacles they might be induced to weigh the evidence by which the new doctrine was ſupported, they were, on many accounts ſtrongly prejudiced againſt it.

Men in government and power, however they are ſometimes repreſented as

overlooking the firſt growth of chriſtianity with a contemptuous confidence, were yet naturally and neceſſarily enemies to the introduction of the goſpel. They were the guardians and miniſters of the national religion: and therefore the very beſt amongſt them ſeem to have regarded it as their duty, to check the progreſs of a dangerous innovation, even by the ſevereſt methods. Some of them were themſelves the objects of publick worſhip, and therefore engaged both by pride and policy, to ſupport ſuch abſurd and profane inſtitutions. And as their publick rites were calculated for the purpoſes of government, they never granted toleration to any, (if they were at all diſpoſed to tolerate) but to ſuch as were entirely conſiſtent with the eſtabliſhed. Thus our holy religion, which not only demanded a reception, but diſdained to mix with the eſtabliſhed worſhip, and pronounced it abominable, muſt have appeared doubly

dangerous to the national conſtitution. Hence, the great ones of the world were the laſt to embrace it, and at firſt oppoſed it with ſuch virulence and cruelty.

ANOTHER ſet of men, enemies to the goſpel from principle, were thoſe of ſpeculation and philoſophy. They had arrived to a conſiderable degree of refinement, were in the higheſt repute for knowledge; all of them entertained opinions utterly inconſiſtent with the chriſtian revelation: and two of their Sects, one, the favourite of the retired and leaſt corrupted, the admirers of virtue and moral dignity; the other, of thoſe more immediately converſant in courts and palaces, in the buſineſs and pleaſures of the world; theſe two Sects, I ſay, whoſe influence was the moſt extenſive, could not, agreeably to their tenets, admit the truth of any revelation at all. And accordingly we read, that

that when Saint Paul was engaged in his ministry at Athens, he met with particular opposition from "*certain of the* "*Stoics and Epicureans*." Indeed, what could have been expected, but that men of great reputation, and obstinately attached to their own principles, would exert their whole power and influence against a doctrine which exposed their weakness, overturned all their pretensions to wisdom, and substituted a new system, in which the meanest of the people might rival them in knowledge?

From these men of speculation, the infection of false and pernicious principles diffused itself through the body of the people; and was one great cause of that unbounded licentiousness and corruption of manners which overspread the Gentiles at the first appearance of the Gospel; and which not only rendered them insensible to its excellence, but

but embittered their rage against an attempt to disturb them in their pleasures, and to awaken them to a sense of their vileness and danger.

Such, then, were the circumstances of the world, when Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of their Lord.—Were we strangers to the sacred records, what notions would we naturally form of men who attempted to establish a doctrine so repugnant to the temporal interest and views of policy, to the opinions and prejudices, to the passions and vices of mankind: so mortifying to pride, so intolerable to sensuality, so unfriendly to present interest? What, but that they were men of penetration and abilities; subtile and insinuating, favoured and supported, and of extraordinary esteem and veneration. Had this been really the case, still their success must have appeared wonderful and unaccountable. But we find them

obscure

obſcure and lowly, plain and unexperienced; their nation deſpiſed; and they the moſt deſpiſed of that nation: ſent forth as ſheep in the midſt of wolves. And accordingly they went forth, in the ſpirit of ſimplicity, of meekneſs and humility. They propoſed their doctrine without reſerve or artifice, and ſubmitted their evidence to the ſtricteſt and ſevereſt ſcrutiny. They went out from Jeruſalem, (where the number of diſciples multiplied greatly) and carried their glad tidings into all the nations round. In leſs than forty years the remoteſt parts of the then known world had heard the ſound of the Goſpel: ſtill it ſpread and triumphed. The heathens were reduced to complain that their temples were deſerted, and their ſacrifices offered no more; and ere two centuries had yet elapſed, an apologiſt for chriſtianity was enabled to repreſent to heathen princes, that their cities, their provinces, their camps, their courts, their palaces,

palaces, were full of Christians; and that it was not possible to extirpate them without destroying far the greater part of their subjects: "*so mightily grew the word* "*of God, and prevailed.*"

And what cause can we assign for this surprizing progress? How is it that the weakest of men could engage in so prodigious an attempt, and be attended with such prodigious success?—Were the scriptures silent, reason itself would teach us, that they must have been furnished with an evidence of their mission fitted to prevail on all kinds and orders of men; suited to the meanest, and able to stand the test of the most refined understandings. Their power must have been superiour to the united powers of the world: and therefore must have been the power of God. In other words, the first teachers of the Gospel must have been endued with supernatural graces and abilities. Nor can a

reason-

reasonable account be assigned for their success, but that plain account which we find in the sacred records. The Lord himself wrought with them, and accompanied their preaching with signs and miraculous powers. They were in a moment enabled to hold converse with all the nations of the earth: and in a moment three thousand persons yielded to this instance of divine power, and "*were added to the disciples.*" As they went forth, nature was subject to them. Their touch gave eyes to the blind; and at their word the lame leaped and walked. And while by these powers they could put gainsayers to silence, they were also endued with extraordinary courage and perseverance, zeal, chearfulness and patience, which neither power nor persecution, nor shame, nor sufferings, nor death could conquer. All these they endured: they were the objects of habitual hatred and detestation: they were reviled and traduced; insulted

ſulted and tormented: "*in all things* "*approving themſelves the miniſters of* "*God: in much patience, in afflictions,* "*in neceſſities, in diſtreſſes, in ſtripes* "*and impriſonments, in tumults, in la-* "*bours, in watchings, in faſtings.*" And yet, in all theſe things they were "*more than conquerours.*" God had permitted the heathen to rage againſt them, not only to make their conſtancy and integrity the more illuſtrious, but alſo to ſhew, beyond all poſſibility of doubt, that it was his wiſdom which directed them, his power which ſupported them, and that their amazing ſucceſs could be owing only to thoſe graces with which they were endued from on high.

He was alſo pleaſed to make his interpoſition ſtill more evident, by denying to the firſt Chriſtians even the aids of human learning. Had ſuch aſſiſtance been immediately introduced to the ſupport of the Goſpel, two inconveniences might poſſibly have ariſen from it. It

might

might have been objected by the enemies of Chriſt, that his holy religion was no more than the invention and contrivance of men of policy and abilities: And human doctrines might have corrupted the purity of the Goſpel, and deſcended to poſterity undiſtinguiſhed from it. But God ſo ordained, that the wiſe and learned part of mankind ſhould have full time to examine the evidence, to conſider the tendency, and obſerve the progreſs of the Goſpel; and then embrace it, when they could be ſuſpected of no other motive but true conviction; and that if they ſhould attempt to blend their own inventions with it, (as they really did attempt) future ages might have a primitive rule of faith, of whoſe purity there could be no doubt, whereby to judge of all ſuch mixtures.

And now we have ſeen our holy religion, in its original depreſſed and perſecuted

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might have been objected by the enemies of Christ, that his holy religion was no more than the invention and contrivance of men of policy and abilities: And human doctrines might have corrupted the purity of the Gospel, and descended to posterity undistinguished from it. But God so ordained, that the wise and learned part of mankind should have full time to examine the evidence, to consider the tendency, and observe the progress of the Gospel; and then embrace it, when they could be suspected of no other motive but true conviction; and that if they should attempt to blend their own inventions with it, (as they really did attempt) future ages might have a primitive rule of faith, of whose purity there could be no doubt, whereby to judge of all such mixtures.

And now we have seen our holy religion, in its original depressed and persecuted

secuted state; in which it continued to triumph over all the rage and cruelty of its adversaries, 'till at length it subdued them, and obliged the rulers and princes of this world "*to cast their crowns be-*" *fore the throne of the Lamb.*" Such a victory, one might imagine, would have secured our religion from any farther difficulties; but, alas! new trials and new enemies now awaited it. Scarcely had it gained the civil power to its aid, and tasted the advantages of protection, when "*another king arose, who knew not*" the people of God; and who, when cruelty had proved ineffectual, exerted all the arts of craft and policy against them. But here again they were victorious. His malicious attempts did honour to that profession which he meant to render the object of contempt; and, by God's mercy, confirmed the truth of that religion in a wonderful manner, which he endeavoured to overthrow. And when at length their open enemies

were

were no more, and the civil power was firmly attached to their ſide; that the difference between the power of God, and the weak and ineffectual aſſiſtance of the arm of fleſh might ſtill be more manifeſt, protection and worldly proſperity proved a moſt dangerous ſnare to them. The vices of proſperity were introduced with its advantages. The humility and charity, the purity and ſimplicity, the ſanctity and ſelf-denial which had diſtinguiſhed the followers of Chriſt, began now to be unknown. Pride and diſſention, luxury and pomp, and ſplendour, licentiouſneſs and ſenſuality, ſucceeded to them. The family for which our Lord was contented to ſuffer, was crumbled into innumerable diviſions. Paſtors and teachers were no longer choſen for their eminent zeal and holineſs. Violence and faction were called in to eſtabliſh them; nor did they feed the flock, but, like ravening wolves, deſtroyed and gorged themſelves

with

with the ſpoils of it. Bitter and cruel contentions about points of an indifferent nature were ſubſtituted in the place of a godly zeal for the eſſential parts of Chriſtianity. New and unworthy doctrines were gradually introduced; and the native beauty of the Goſpel ſullied and diſgraced by foreign mixtures. What was originally ſo plain, ſo eaſy and delightful, became dark and myſterious, rigid and ſevere, nay utterly irreconcileable to the reaſon, and inconſiſtent with the nature of man.—Till at length God, in his infinite wiſdom, made the ſins of his people to be their puniſhment; and, while the impoſture of Mahomet enſlaved the Eaſtern world, permitted the ſpiritual tyranny of Rome to eſtabliſh its throne completely in the Weſt.—Then were the predictions of the holy Prophets verified. This "*man of ſin*," whoſe coming was "*after the working of Satan, with* "*ſigns and lying wonders*;—*who taught*

"*men*

"*men to give heed to doctrines of souls*
"*departed,—forbidding to marry—and*
"*commanding to abstain from meats;—*
"*made war upon the saints and overcame*
"*them:—and power was given unto him*
"*over all kindreds and tongues and na-*
"*tions.—The kings of the earth com-*
"*mitted fornication with the mother of*
"*harlots:*" that is, were led into idolatry by the power so called. "*By her*
"*sorceries* (her numerous and absurd rites, and her arts for reconciling men to God without inward purity and moral goodness: "*by her sorceries*," I say)
"*were all nations deceived; and she was*
"*drunken with the blood of the Saints,*
"*and of the Martyrs of Jesus.*"

Yet still God had not forgotten to be gracious. He was pleased, after a long night of darkness, to permit his light to arise on some part of the Christian world. We were rescued from that "*yoke, which our fathers were not*
"*able*

"*able to bear.*"—But ſcarcely had we taſted the bleſſings of liberty, when we began to abuſe them. New dangers threatened our holy religion. A ſet of men aroſe, who ſtole thoſe weapons with which the corruptions of Chriſtianity had been attacked ſo ſucceſsfully, and attempted to turn them againſt Chriſtianity itſelf; denied the Lord that bought them; and by their repeated aſſaults, conſtantly defeated and conſtantly renewed, obliged his ſervants to be ever laying the foundation anew. Happily for us! the end of all this obſtinacy hath been, to confirm our faith. Our enemies have raiſed it numbers of illuſtrious defenders; have occaſioned it to be more frequently and ſtrictly examined, and of conſequence have made its truth and luſtre the more glorious. Thus hath God, according to his wonted mercy, produced good out of evil. And we truſt that He, who in all its trials, hath ever manifeſted his favour to his church,

church, will ſtill continue to manifeſt it: ſince he is faithful who hath promiſed that "*the gates of hell ſhall not* "*prevail againſt it.*"

But have no natural cauſes been aſſigned for this victorious progreſs of the Goſpel, which is now repreſented as ſtrictly miraculous?—Yes. And the truth which I have now endeavoured to eſtabliſh, will receive a ſtill additional confirmation from propoſing and examining ſome of theſe pretended cauſes. This ſhall therefore be the buſineſs of another diſcourſe, together with ſuch obſervations upon the ſubject now before us, as may contribute to promote the great ends of all God's graces and diſpenſations: the ſtrengthening our faith, the purifying of our hearts, and the ſalvation of our ſouls, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

SERMON XII.

The Power of God in the Encreaſe and Eſtabliſhment of the Goſpel; with an Examination of the natural Cauſes aſſigned for its Progreſs.

Preached in TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

PART II.

ISAIAH, chap. lx. verſe 27.

A little one ſhall become a thouſand; and a ſmall one a ſtrong nation: I the Lord will haſten it in his time.

IT was obſerved, in a former diſcourſe upon theſe words, that they contained a prophetic declaration of the rapid and extenſive progreſs with which our holy religion was to ſpread through the

world: a progreſs infinitely diſproportioned to its firſt beginnings, and ſuch as manifeſted a power ſuperiour to all human agency. I endeavoured to explain the wonderful completion of this prophecy; to illuſtrate the divine power, by which the Chriſtian Faith was propagated and ſupported; to prove, from the ſtate and circumſtances of the world, that all the powers of man were, from the firſt, of neceſſity, combined againſt it; that all the fury and all the ſubtilty that Satan could inſpire, were exerted to overthrow it. That the natural abilities of its teachers were ſuch as could not overcome even the ſmalleſt part of this oppoſition; and that their ſucceſs was ſo great as could ſcarcely be expected in the natural courſe of things, even if all the powers that fought againſt it had united in favour of their deſigns. Thus have we an argument of the divine authority of our holy religion, ſimilar to that which is deduced from an

exami-

examination of the visible world, to prove the existence of its supreme author.

But, as men have sometimes attributed the formation of material things to, I know not what, fortuitous concourse of ineffectual causes or agents, so have we found reasoners who endeavour to elude the force of that argument now before us, by suggesting some natural causes for the introduction, progress and establishment of the Gospel. I now proceed to consider such of these pretended causes as have been most frequently repeated, (for thus it is that gainsayers have endeavoured to give them some consequence). And not long since have they been repeated by an adversary, in whom our enemies gloried as their champion: who was expected to have marched out like a giant in his strength, to "*defy the armies of the living God*;" but who was found to possess no greater

strength

ſtrength than had already proved ineffectual, and to uſe no other weapons than thoſe which had oftentimes been repelled and broken.

It is ſuggeſted, in the firſt place, that the age in which chriſtianity firſt appeared was prepared for any theological notions; a circumſtance which afforded a conſiderable advantage to its teachers: and that an analogy between certain doctrines of the Goſpel, and thoſe of ſome favourite philoſophers contributed greatly to the ſpreading of the Chriſtian Faith. If ſo, the Goſpel ſhould have gained its firſt and earlieſt converts from the contemplative, the learned, and philoſophical part of mankind: and chiefly from one particular ſect. But we know that the reaſoners of this world received the glad tidings with ſcorn and averſion. To them the Goſpel was fooliſhneſs. Nor does it appear that their vanity and obſtinacy were ſubdued, 'till our holy faith

had

had already "*taken root downwards, and* "*brought forth fruit upwards.*" And when the Apoſtles were ſent out to teach all nations, did they court and cultivate this alliance with human learning, which is ſaid to have been ſo favourable to their ſucceſs? On the contrary, the manner of their preaching was as diſguſting to the profeſſors of human ſcience, as their doctrines. They utterly diſavowed the "*enticing words of man's wiſdom*;" profeſſed to "*know nothing*" but "*Chriſt*," and him "*crucified*:" and warned their followers againſt the "*vain deceits*" of "*Philoſophy*.

It is alſo urged that indulgence to both Jews and Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apoſtolical conduct: and that by this political ſcheme of the Apoſtles, converts ſoon flocked in from different and oppoſite quarters.—And to which of the Apoſtles is this ſcheme chiefly attributed? To

Saint

Saint Paul, a zealous Pharisee, educated in the strictest notions of his sect, and fully possessed with principles and prejudices which represented such a design as impious and abominable.—But unhappily for such reasoners, this union of the Jews and Gentiles, was clearly foretold by the antient Prophets; was the evident and avowed design of the great author of our faith, agreeably to these predictions; was the great obstacle which his followers at first encountered; was a part of the Christian dispensation which they themselves embraced with difficulty and by degrees.—To teach the Jews, that they should form one church with the Gentiles whom they regarded as utterly unworthy of such privileges!—To teach the Gentiles, that they were to form one church with the Jews, whose nation and religion they held in abhorrence and contempt; that they were to acknowledge a crucified Jew as their Lord and Saviour!—Was such a violent attack upon the preju-

dices

dices of both, the natural means of reconciling and gaining both? It was a ſuperiour power alone which rendered ſuch means effectual. Human policy muſt have at once rejected, or rather never could have ſuggeſted them.

Had the Apoſtles indeed taught a religion combined of the rites and doctrines, both of Jews and Gentiles: had they united the ſacrifices of Jeruſalem with the inſpection of the entrails which the Heathens practiſed; the rites of baptiſm or circumciſion with the initiations of Ceres or Bacchus; the doctrine of a reſurrection with the doctrine of Tartarus and Elyſium; then might we indeed have traced the work of human policy in their preaching. And hence might their adverſaries have perhaps fairly accounted for their ſucceſs. (Although we know the great Impoſtor of the Eaſt truſted not for his ſucceſs to a contrivance ſimilar to this)—Or had they

practiſed,

practiſed, what ſome pretended teachers of later times have thought convenient: had they diſguiſed, palliated, concealed, or denied the doctrines of their maſter, according to the various tempers, opinions, and prejudices of their hearers, no wonder that converts had been gained from different and oppoſite quarters.—But what were their methods of conciliation?—To the Jews they taught, that, by "*the Law, no fleſh*" is "*juſtified*;" that "*the Law*" was "*but the ſhadow of* "*good things to come*; that its ſacrifices and offerings had been taken away by Chriſt, that he might eſtabliſh a new and better covenant.—To the Gentiles it was declared, that they ſhould "*depart from* "*idols*" to "*ſerve the living God*: that "*profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they* "*became fools*:" that they had "*changed* "*the truth of God into a lye. Touch not,* "*taſte not, handle not*," were denounced, with equal vehemence, againſt Jewiſh ordinances, and Heathen ſuperſtitions: and,

And, to ſum up all, "*Chriſt crucified*," was every where preached boldly, plainly, and directly, though, "*to the Jews a* "*ſtumbling-block, and to the Greeks fooliſh-* "*neſs*." And, "*the fooliſhneſs of God*" was "*wiſer than men*," and "*the weakneſs* "*of God*" was "*ſtronger than men*."

It will no doubt excite the ſurprize and indignation of the ingenuous reaſoner, to hear, (if indeed he be yet to be informed) that another cauſe of the great encreaſe of converts to chriſtianity on the firſt preaching of the Apoſtles, is ſaid to be the charitable diſtribution of goods among the primitive chriſtians, which brought numbers into the pale from an aſſurance of being ſupported.—But was this a motive to thoſe who made ſuch diſtribution, of whom the numbers were conſiderable? "*While it remained, was it* "*not their own?*" And were they induced to embrace the new doctrine, in order to partake of their own, in common with their

their brethren? No! "but numbers of 'the poorer and lower ranks of men 'embraced this ſure means of ſupport.' Support! In what? In diſſolute and vitious living? The church received not thoſe who "*walked diſorderly.*" In indolence and ſloth? The ſolemn declarations of their teachers precluded all ſuch hopes. It was their appointment that "*if any* "*would not work neither ſhould he eat.*" Theſe men therefore choſe to ſubmit to the ſevereſt mortification and ſelf-denial, to ſcorn, and calamity, and perſecution, from the hopes of ſome ſmall aſſiſtance to their honeſt labours. How ſhameful is this aſſertion of our adverſaries, at the very time when they themſelves, though deterred by no calamity or perſecution, though invited by the hopes, not of ſome ſlight and temporary relief, but of an everlaſting redemption from ſin and miſery, of peace in this world, and an eternal happineſs in the next,

yet

yet obſtinately refuſe to believe and repent!

Again. The blood of the martyrs is ſaid to be the ſeed of the church: By which we underſtand, that the courage, conſtancy and patience of the firſt ſufferers of the chriſtian doctrine naturally awakened men's attention, induced them to examine their religion and its evidence, and of conſequence to embrace it. But our adverſaries affect to explain this maxim differently. The ſufferings of theſe martyrs, ſay they, made ſtrong impreſſions upon common minds, and induced them to embrace the cauſe of the oppreſſed, without any evidence or conviction. That is, racks, and tortures, and death are powerful allurements to human nature: and the view of ſufferings naturally leads men to expoſe themſelves to the ſame ſufferings. But at length a bold adverſary hath appeared to relieve his

aſſociates

aſſociates from the ſhame of ſuch aſſertions. His bold hand ſtrikes at the knot at once; by inſinuating with the moſt hardened indifference to evidence and conviction, that in the primitive times there were neither martyrs nor perſecutions.

But inſtead of proceeding in the diſcuſſion of more minute and ſtill more unreaſonable objections, I now haſten to offer ſome few obſervations upon the ſubject before us, which may tend to give it the due influence upon our minds.

And firſt we may obſerve the unreaſonableneſs of ſome reflections into which we may have been ſometimes betrayed. Such are theſe: 'How 'happy the condition of thoſe who 'ſaw the miracles, and heard the 'words of our Lord and his Diſciples! 'How much leſs favoured our condi-

'tion,

'tion, who at this diſtant time muſt 'be contented with the report of thoſe 'things of which they were living 'witneſſes. And how much more 'guilty than we were thoſe men who 'ſhut their eyes againſt ſuch wonderful 'works!' But they who thus affect to admire at the inattention of the world to the actions and diſcourſes of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, are themſelves guilty of the like inattention. They ſtill converſe with us with the ſame divine wiſdom, the ſame paternal affection, the ſame zeal and ſolicitude for our ſalvation. The commandment "*is not hidden* "*from*" us, "*neither is it afar off.*" It is not in the deſert, whither the immediate followers of our Lord flocked with ſuch eagerneſs as to forget their food. "*Neither is it beyond the ſea, that thou* "*ſhouldeſt ſay, Who ſhall go over the ſea* "*for us, and bring it unto us, that we* "*may hear it, and do it. But the word* "*is very nigh unto*" us. And we have now

now seen that the progress and establishment of christianity, is a direct proof that its first teachers must have been endued with "*power from on high!*" Since then, the Gospel is at all preached to us, since it is at this day to be found in the world, we are as fully assured of the miracles of our Lord and his followers, as if we had ourselves been eye witnesses. He who surveys a beautiful and solid edifice, would inspire us with disadvantageous suspicions of his temper and understanding, were he to attempt to shew, by some pretended reasoning, that it had been erected in all its statelyness and proportion by weakness and ignorance. He can no more reasonably doubt of its being the work of skill and power adequate to the design, than if he had watched its progress, and beheld the workmen labouring to raise it.—If they who lived in the time of the Apostles had their peculiar advantages, "the succeeding ages

have had their's also. Every new defeat of the enemies of the Gospel was a new proof of its divinity. And these latter days have afforded a new confirmation of the faith by the gradual completion of those prophecies of the old and new testament, which respected these latter days. That, for instance, which I formerly mentioned, of the apostacy which was to overspread the christian world, when its outward enemies were subdued. And that of the total dispersion of the Jews, and (what at once discovers the immediate interposition of Providence) their continuing for so many ages in a state of separation, ready to obey his call who in his own good time shall "*gather together the outcasts of Israel.*" Let our adversaries then dream of some traditionary evidence decreasing gradually, and at length vanishing. Such is not our evidence. Our light hath ever shone undiminished. It hath shone, and we must still over "*shine more and more*" unto

that "*perfect day*" when faith shall cease.

SECONDLY—we had occasion to take notice of the corruptions of the christian world, when our foreign enemies had been subdued. Unbelievers have from hence taken occasion to object, 'to 'what purpose was the Gospel given? 'or how can we be assured, that it is 'of heavenly origin, when its influ-'ence upon the hearts of its professors 'hath been ever so imperfect?'—Thus is "*the name of God and his doctrine blas-*"*phemed*," by means of many who call themselves followers of Christ. But the subject on which we have been engaged, points out the true conclusion to be drawn from the corruption of christians, 'that under all the disadvantages and 'obstructions derived from hence it is 'impossible our holy religion should 'subsist, were it not supported by the 'divine power.' The means of grace

 are

are powerful, but not irreſiſtible. The diſcoveries of our duty are bright: but vice and obſtinacy may ſhut their eyes againſt them, or neglect their guidance. And they who from thence argue againſt the divinity of our faith would yet think it ſtrange to aſſert that the excellence of any human law was impeached, or its authority deſtroyed, by the multitude of tranſgreſſors. There was a time, indeed, when the profeſſors of our religion were "*blameleſs and harmleſs, the ſons of God,* "*without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked* "*and perverſe nation, among whom they* "*ſhone as lights in the world.*" In the moſt corrupt ages, there never have been wanting, nor are there yet wanting, faithful ſervants. Who can ſay of how great value the immortal ſouls of theſe few may be in the ſight of God? And perhaps their numbers as well as their integrity may in a great meaſure eſcape our obſervation. Nor doth ſcripture or reaſon forbid us to hope that a time will

come, when God shall be pleased to make such farther manifestations of his power; perhaps, such reformations in our nature by his grace, that the doctrine and profession of the Gospel shall have their full extent and influence: that the saints and servants of our Lord shall here enjoy that happiness which must naturally attend an universal obedience to the divine will: and "*the kingdoms* "*of the earth become the kingdoms of the* "*Lord, and his Christ.*

But, lastly,—While we are careful not to be offended, we are to guard with equal care against giving offence. "*Woe* "*unto that man,*" saith the Lord, "*by* "*whom the offence cometh!*" Who by the neglect of his duty, where he is particularly enabled and obliged to advance the cause of religion, or in general, by the influence and example of his vitious practices, prevents men from coming into the ways of righteousness. Let us seriously

consider

consider the several difficulties with which our holy religion hath contended. We find, that when the lives of its professors were suitable to their doctrine, though all the world united to oppose it, yet it spread and flourished: but when they became corrupt, no worldly advantages could prevent it from declining. Let us then examine how far those vices prevail among us, which have always proved the most dangerous enemies of our faith: like those spells and sorceries that fables speak of, as stopping the lights of heaven in their course, and depriving the world of their heat and splendour.—God hath never continued his favours to those who persevere in abusing them: but when whole nations or single persons have despised the "*riches of his* "*grace*," he has withdrawn them, and permitted their unrighteousness to fall heavily upon their own heads, and repay them

them with blindness and hardness of heart.

Let these reflections sink deep into our minds: and while God vouchsafeth his light to us, let us endeavour to "*walk* "*in the light*," that we may secure (for thus only can we secure) the blessing of its continuance. Let us labour to establish the kingdom of Christ in our hearts, by cultivating those affections and perfecting that obedience which become his servants. Let our influence be exerted and our example displayed to enforce and extend the practice of righteousness. Great is their reward who shall embrace those opportunities with which God hath blessed them, of enlarging the visible administration of Christ, of sounding the gospel in those ears which have never yet been blessed with the glad tidings. At least let not our ardent prayers be wanting. Let us beseech God, in the words of our church, 'that he would

'please

'pleaſe of his gracious goodneſs ſhortly
'to accompliſh the number of his elect,
'and to haſten the kingdom of his
'dear Son!'

To Him with the Father.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.